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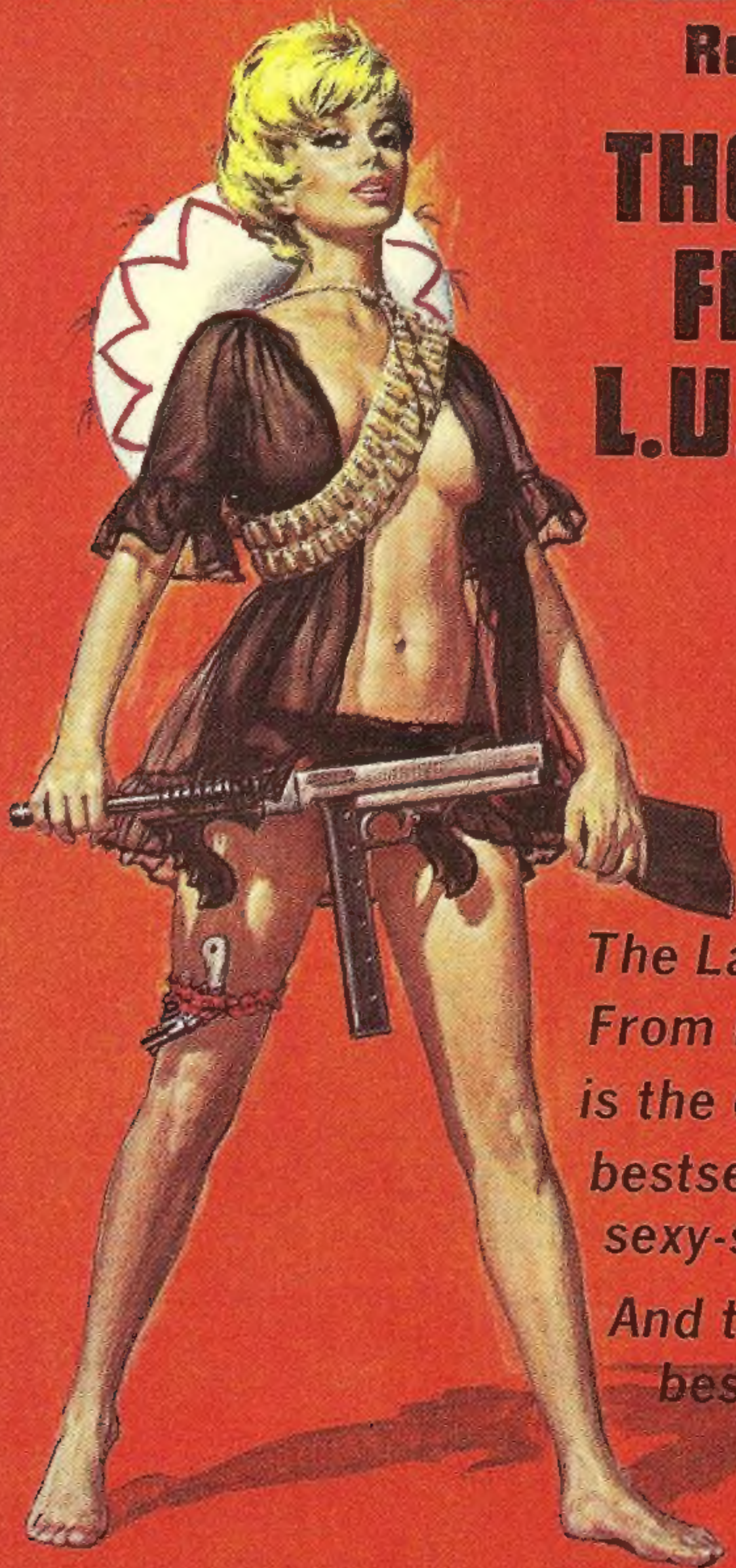
SOUTH OF THE BORDELLO

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Rod Gray

THE LADY FROM L.U.S.T. #8



*The Lady
From L.U.S.T.
is the country's
bestselling
sexy-spy series.*

*And this one is the
best of the lot.*

EVE DRUM IN THE GRIP OF TERRORISTAS

"You will dance for me," said El Oro, the leader of the Communist guerilla band.

It came through to me that through this orgy the *terroristas* were engaging in an escape mechanism from the cognitive processes. A sort of a carnal coffeebreak. I had taken part in orgies before—all in the line of duty. This was something else again. It was an explosion of primitive needs and hungers, it was part and parcel of the mood of these *terroristas*—and it was almost a frightening thing.

This was early man and early woman. Male and female with the wraps off, unashamed and uninhibited. They were animals. Well, I was ready for anything, as usual. Ready to match the frenzy of the *terroristas* in spirit as well as in letter.

Lazily I shook my shoulders, making the khaki shirt slide down my arms. I was jellying all over, trying desperately to remember that I was in Mexico on a job and not just out here for kicks."

SOUTH OF THE BORDELLO

Rod Gray

an espionage novel

A TOWER BOOK

SOUTH OF THE BORDELLO

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185 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10016**

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CHAPTER ONE

I had never bought a woman before.

I was going to buy one now, here in Tijuana in a back street bistro, where anything went. All around me there were men drooling at their jaws and maybe elsewhere, for all I knew, at sight of the black velvet stage drop and the faint blue light that spotlighted it, with a girl standing there stark naked, waiting to be bought by some nigger nut staring at her.

Beside me in the darkened room, I heard David Andonian sigh. He is my case officer for L.U.S.T.—the League of Undercover Spies and Terrorists—in whose service I draw a damn good salary. He was posing as my husband here in Mexico, and since we were both working on this assignment together, he was in on the girl slave action.

My name is Eve Drum. The boys at L.U.S.T. headquarters call me Oh Oh Sex, maybe with some justifica-

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tion. I am considered an expert on the subject, as well as being a damn good secret service operative.

We were in Mexico to smash a ring of terrorists.

Yeah, just the two of us.

Right now David was interested in smashing something more than a terrorist crowd. His eyes were bulging along with his manhood as he feasted them on the naked female framed in the blue spot. She was pretty, with a fleshy body, and she was giggling nervously as the auctioneer posed her for the enjoyment of the crowd of onlookers. Her pubic patch was a blob of darkness between her meaty thighs; she made no move to cover it, nor the heavy young breasts that wobbled lazily to her every motion.

"Too bad, David," I breathed.

"Huh? What?"

"That she isn't the one we're here to buy."

"Yeah. Sure."

The girl we had been sent to purchase was a woman agent for the Mexican police. She was supposed to know about the terrorists, enough to clue us in on their location and mode of operation. The terrorists had their own spies around and about as well, because the girl was too frightened to meet us normally; we had to do it this way to protect her.

"Do a little dance," the auctioneer coaxed.

The girl giggled more shrilly, held her arms out from her sides, and did a shimmy that sent her breasts bouncing to the cardinal points of the compass. Those swinging love jugs drove David forward to the edge of his chair. They even sent a scopolagniacal stab of excitement throughout my own libido.

I put my hand on the hard thigh beside my soft one. David rested his hand on my garterclasp and began checking the area around it with his fingertips. I could see a number of other American tourists—real married folks or only make-believe, like us, I never did find out—feeling

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the goodies and wondering what it would be like to buy themselves a girl to fool around with in their hotel room.

This sort of thing goes on south of the border, but in a very hush-hush way, so nobody should get scandalized and complain too much and too loudly to the authorities. It is a great source of income to the poor Mexican peasants and Indians who bring their prettiest daughters to the vice vultures who run the slave market. I have been told the parents get about two-thirds the purchase price, the rest goes to the auctioneer. You can guess what the girl gets.

This slave sellquarters is located some distance off Revolution Avenue in Tijuana. It is known to the initiates: to the rich young bachelors of wealthy Mexican families, to the agents for bordellos from here to there, to American *touristas*, and to the young men in shirtsleeves and tight chinos who have saved up such monies as they can lay their hands on, to indulge themselves in a dreams-come-true situation with a woman they can do damn well what they want.

"Very occasionally there is a bout of spirited bidding between a well-heeled bachelor and a pair of rich American tourists for the ownerships of a particularly pretty *puta*. The young man becomes angry, he shouts and swears in Spanish at the man and wife who yell back at him in Americanese. It is great entertainment.

The auctioneer is no fool. He often offers the girl to some teenage toreador who cannot afford a girl any other way, so that the boy and the girl will put on a show for the onlookers. Naturally, the auctioneer is no altruist, he knows the value of a sexhibition at a time like this; it makes the bachelor and the wealthy American *touristas* bid away over their heads to come at such a bit of belly plaster, themselves.

My female intuition was telling me we were going to get such a show, right now. The auctioneer was grinning, looking around at the intent faces on which were mirrored all the fleshly lusts mankind has ever known. To my left,

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an older man and a woman I am sure was his wife, were whispering excitedly to one another, they were getting ready to bid the sky for the naked girl. In front of me, a well-dressed young Mexican was stirring restlessly. Mutual opponents for the upcoming sexual sweepstakes, I felt positive.

"*Como? Eh? How about it, folks?*" the auctioneer was saying.

"*Si! Si! Yes! Yes!*" the initiates howled back.

The man on the stage made a pretense of staring at a number of young men standing against the wall. Actually, I am certain he had his boy all picked out, long beforehand. He would take no chances on servicing his girl slave with a diseased male. His business would blow up under him, if that happened—fun and games is something a government official may wink an eye at—a case of clap is something else again.

In one sense, at least, these girls were clean.

"*Tu me vas, Manuel! You'll do.*"

His pointing finger stabbed through the blue light at a somewhat older youth, who may have been in his early twenties. He wore black sideburns with his curly black head of hair, he affected black chinos with golden slashings down the seams and a light blue sports shirt.

The youth straightened with a little smile, he dropped his cigarette and ground out the butt on the hard dirt floor. His fingers began unfastening his shirt buttons as he sauntered forward toward the stage.

Bare to his middle, revealing a muscular chest, he was pushing his pants down and off his hips as he came into the blue spotlight. Since his fingers had hold of his boxer shorts as well, he came into view full-armed, like Priapus in a garden, as the blue spotlight enfolded his nakedness.

"*Ooooh,*" breathed the woman to my left.

There was no attempt at anything but instant sex. The young man put up his hands and caught the breasts hanging there before him. He shook them a little and used

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them to draw the girl toward him for a kiss. His hands left her white melons, slid down her bare, curving sides to the quivering buttocks. His fingers sank deep.

The girl moaned, shivering. When the male drew back, revealing how aroused he had become, there was a gasp from the older woman beside me.

"How much for him?" she cried.

The youth turned his handsome face toward the audience that sat in near darkness, smiling, showing even white teeth. "*Mas tarde, querida*—after I finish with this one."

There was laughter around the little hall in which the woman herself joined. It was breathless laughter as if the audience had no time for mirth; each man and woman was too engrossed with the way in which the young man was lifting the naked girl and settling her down upon his member, her heavy thighs rippling loosely until she closed them around his hips.

She began to bounce up and down. The young man walked her a few feet to a bare wooden table and let her buttocks sink down upon its surface. Then he caught her legs and raised them, hammering away all the time. He had good staying powers, that youth, he was a regular bull. I found myself with a dry mouth and thumping heart, watching; the woman who had offered to buy him was moaning deep in her throat.

The girl slave wailed, clutching the young man with arms and thighs as she shuddered out her bliss. She clung like a leech, kissing his broad hairy chest while he stood patiently and let her orgasmic trembling die down. He was experienced, that one.

The woman to my left shouted, "A thousand pesos for the boy."

Eight pesos are roughly equivalent to a United States dollar. The old girl was offering about hundred and twenty bucks for the youth. I saw the boy look at the auctioneer, who nodded heavily and moved forward, his moon-face wrapped in a big smile.

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"Senor Manuel is not for sale, madam—but in the interests of good neighbor policy he is willing to sell himself to you for a day and a night, at the thousand pesos you have so kindly offered."

The woman gave a whoop. Onstage, the young man was disengaging himself from the attentions of the naked girl, who obviously wanted more of what he had to give. He pushed her away kindly, as some of the onlookers chuckled. Then he reached for his clothes while the auctioneer went on with his spiel.

"This young woman—you have seen for yourselves how she loves tumbling—is for sale. He is a *perita en dulce*, she will turn your bed into a jungle hothouse. *Ay di mi!* Study her! She is wriggling like a worm on a hook, demanding satisfaction. Who will give it to her? And for how much?"

The bachelor shouted, "A thousand pesos!"

The man and wife called, "Two thousand!"

The bidding went on. When the price got to be ten thousand pesos, the young bachelor scowled at the Americanos and shrugged his shoulders philosophically. There would be more women put up for sale, and no woman was worth that much money, in his eyes.

The woman on the stage got back into her thin dress and came down the aisle while the husband was counting out the ten thousand pesos. Then the man and woman took her between them and walked out of the building.

David sighed. "I wonder how much we're going to be nicked?"

"It's L.U.S.T. money, David," I consoled him.

We had to wait while the auctioneer sold a pretty Indian girl, a somewhat plainer peasant woman, and a peppery girl with mixed antecedents, before we saw our female secret agent. She was young, very pretty, with long black hair falling down her smooth bare shoulders. She wore a tattered dress so sun-faded it was next to colorless. Somebody had ripped it so it hung on the very rims of her upper arms.

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Her black eyes defied the world as the auctioneer gestured at her. She was proud of her slimly curved body, of the firm hips pressing their rondures into the worn cloth that hid her nakedness, of the full breasts stabbing stiff nipples into the bodice.

The rich bachelor in front of me breathed, "Ahhh!"

David sat up straighter.

Bachelor boy yelled, "Five thousand pesos!"

We were going to have trouble with this one. He was an beaver eager for a bit of blanket ruffling. He flashed a grin around the room after his three-word speech—I guess he imagined the rest of us would faint—and nodded his head as if satisfied with his particular slice of the world.

I just had to deflate him. I yelled, "Ten thousand!"

Hell! It was L.U.S.T. money. In other words, it comes from the American taxpayer, and it was being used to keep America safe, so I had no qualms about using all I needed.

The bachelor turned his head and gave me a malignant stare. Oddly enough, I felt a kind of shock run down my spine and into my toes. This was not the irritated glance of a rival for an auction item. It was malevolent, filled with hate. It was the kind of look Ho Chi Minh might give to Lyndon Johnson.

Maybe it was my female intuition kicking up her heels. I filed that look away as Communist, not so pure and not so simple. I told my memory cells to put that brown face and sideburned curly brown hair away in my subconscious. His lips were over full, but they could tighten to thin lines when he was angry, like now, and across his thick bull neck—visible above the sports shirt he was wearing—was a hairline scar, slowly turning a raging red.

He turned away and shouted, "Twenty thousand!"

Now David looked at him. Twenty thousand pesos—twenty-five hundred American dollars!—was altogether too damn much to pay for any woman, here in Tijuana. It told David and me that we were suspect in some quarters of not really being a tourist husband and wife. Possibly the

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terrorist gang we'd been sent south of the border to contact and destroy was on to us. I glanced at David, he nodded at me.

The pretty girl onstage was looking worried. The plan was for us to buy her, not for somebody else to horn in. I knew how she must be feeling; I have been sold as a slave myself, on one of my adventures. It is no fun, wondering if things are going haywire and you'll wind up with the wrong master.

I yelled, "Fifty thousand!"

The girl in the tattered dress almost smiled as the worry emptied itself from her brilliant black eyes. She glanced at the bachelor who was cursing softly under his breath. Five thousand U.S.A. dollars is a fortune, three miles south of San Diego. Even for a rich Mexican bachelor.

"A hundred thousand pesos," he screamed.

This was my cue. "Mister auctioneer," I called. "I believe only cash is acceptable to you. I have here," and I rummaged in my handbag, "fifty thousand pesos, in good, spendable cash. I ask to see the hundred thousand pesos our rival is supposed to be able to produce!"

I damn well doubted that he had that kind of moola on his person. I was right. His neck got red under its brown skin and he quivered as if I'd insulted him. Suddenly he whirled and reached for me with his hands.

David was a little faster. His huge fingers caught the bachelor and whirled him sideways away from me. David Anderjanian is six feet four inches tall, he weighs in the vicinity of two hundred and thirty pounds. He has played professional football, and he was a heavyweight boxing champion during his college days. There is no fat on him, just bone and muscle.

His fist is like a rock, doubled up. It was doubled up as he hit the Mexican alongside his face. The bachelor went backward, arms flailing in the air in a kind of reflex, because he was out on his feet. He landed five feet away, sprawled across a bench, and just lay there.

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"My bid still goes," I called. "Fifty thousand pesos for the girl."

The auctioneer was standing there with his mouth wide open, looking down at the unconscious man. When I repeated my bid, he lifted his eyes to stare blankly at me. Then he recovered his mental balance.

"*Si, senora!* Fifty thousand pesos." He looked around the room that was so ominously quiet. "I have a bid of fifty thousand pesos. Do I hear anyone say any more? Then for fifty thousand pesos—going, going, gone."

The girl on the stage was all smiles. She hopped down off the little dais and advanced toward me as David moved forward to pay the auctioneer with the money I pushed into his hand. I turned when the girl came up to me, caught her elbow and guided her along beside me. Here and there, from the dark faces of the Mexican youths lining the wall, we caught sullen glances.

In a moment we were out in the hot Mex sunshine, on the little street off Revolution Avenue. The street was almost empty at this siesta hour, only a peddler with his wares in baskets slung all over his body could be seen at the far end of the road. I took the girl by the hand and led her toward the parked Mustang in which David and I had driven into Tijuana.

"Don't say a word," I cautioned in a low voice.

She nodded, her ripe red mouth a little open as she breathed in the sultry air. As well as I, she knew there was something wrong about the situation. She did not know how the *terroristas* had stumbled onto our little plan, but she was happy that things were working out so perfectly.

Or were they?

As we turned into the parking lot, we saw half a dozen young men in loose, open shirts and tight chinos, glance at us. They had been slouching lazily near our fire-engine-red Mustang. As if our appearance were the signal they were expecting, they straightened up and snapped to attention.

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"We'll wait for David," I breathed.

I felt the tension run like cold water down my spine. I could fight six young Mexicans all alone, if I had to but I preferred to have the big Viking alongside me in a melee. His fists, when he threw them, were like sledgehammers falling.

My hands fumbled in my handbag for a very special cigarette lighter I carry on some of my assignments for L.U.S.T. It shoots tiny needles tipped with a fast-action chemical guaranteed to put a man under within seconds. I lit a cigarette, puffed deeply, and juggled the lighter in my palm. If those young hoods wanted trouble, I would have the wherewithal handy to feed it to them.

David came walking along like a juggernaut. His size certainly looked good to me. I think it eased my companion too, for she sighed a little, with relief.

"Those toughs keep looking at us the way a cat looks at a mouse, David," I told him under my breath as my case officer and I flanked the Mexican girl on our way to the Mustang.

"Pay them no heed," the Viking said softly. He rubbed his right hand, the one that had hit the bachelor inside the slave building. "I just wish they'd start something."

David got his wish. As we neared the car, the toughs moved out of their slouching postures. From behind their backs, they brought out bicycle chains and small baseball bats. They moved toward us in a body, fanning out so as to be able to hit us from all sides.

"Here they come," I snapped.

I whirled and aimed the cigarette lighter at the nearest youth. He was lifting his baseball bat sideways, intending to bring it around in a sweeping curve so it would hit the side of my head. He'd have broken my skull if it had landed. I pressed the lighter, there was a *swooot* sound.

The young man halted, stared down at his belly. The needle had pricked him, it had gone deep inside him. He had a surprised look on his cruel face. Maybe he thought a

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bee had stung him because he took two more steps toward me, his bat coming around in a sweeping motion, before he fell flat on his face.

He lay there, sound asleep.

I had no time to spend on him. The boy beside him was leaping at me, bicycle chain slashing the air. I ducked, I reached out with a hand and caught him by the arm. I twisted my girl-girl body sideways, still in that crouch. My hip caught him in the loins. I heaved, with both hands fastened on his arm.

He rose up gracefully into the air, legs over his head. His mouth opened and he screamed. Then the back of his head was hitting the Mustang fender with a hollow crunch. Senseless, his body slid down past the wheel, the top of his head hit the blacktop, and he folded over.

Our slavegirl secret agent was struggling in the hands of a third boy whose big fingers were holding her helpless as he dragged her toward one of his friends who had a bat uplifted, about to clobber her skull. I fired a needle at this one, then leaped to free the girl by a judo hold on the young man gripping her.

While all this had been going on, I'd been hearing the crunch of flesh on flesh. I turned my head slightly, seeing David Anderjanian hammering his fist into the bloody face of a fifth youth. The sixth one lay at his feet, absolutely unconscious, arms flung wide, his mouth bleeding.

My hands caught the Mexican boy by his long hair. I yanked back. He gave a sudden yelp and let go the girl. He tried to turn, but I let him do it only on my own terms, as my hands swung him sideways so that he fell off balance.

My knee came up. It bonked his head.

Before he could fall, I hit him with the edge of my hand across his throat, twice. He went into something like a fit, hands on his crushed Adam's apple, his body flopping along the ground, making dull thuds.

David hit his unconscious opponent a final blow, then snapped, "Into the car, girls. *Prisa! Prisa!*"

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We hurried, the girl diving between me and David, who sat behind the wheel. We slammed doors. The motor roared to life. We wanted no trouble with the police, we just wanted out, fast. David let in the clutch and we shot from the parking lot like an Olympic sprinter off his blocks. Seconds later, we were two blocks away.

David slowed to forty miles an hour.

"We'll talk in the motel room," he said. "Oh, by the way—what's your name, honey?"

The girl dimpled a smile. "Estela Lopez. Lieutenant Lopez, of the Mexican police, if you prefer."

"I'd prefer Estela," David grinned.

"Estela," I chipped in. "It seems as if they're onto us. In the hall, that Mexican bidding for you was something more than a hot-pants Romeo."

"Si, I think so myself."

David growled, "And those toughs in the parking lot weren't just hanging around to beg for pesos. They were armed for slaughter. Mexicans don't go 'round slaughtering American tourists, here in Tijuana. The people in Tijuana make most of their income from American tourists."

"It was the *terroristas*, si," agreed Estela.

"They've tumbled to our little game?" I wondered.

The girl shook her long black hair, saying, "I don't know. I thought I'd covered my tracks, but maybe they were too smart for me." She sighed, then added, "It is perhaps better you forget your plans to break up this terrorist gang. It is too dangerous for you."

"The General would take a dim view of that," growled David. The General is the head of L.U.S.T. He knows as well as its agents that L.U.S.T. men and women are ready to look the Devil in the eye and spit at him, while on a case.

I patted Estela's smooth hand. "We'll worry about that, honey. It's why we're here. All we want from you are the details." A thought touched the back of my mind. "Oh! And speaking of the details—maybe somebody's

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bugged our motel room, David."

"If they knew we were going to buy a girl police lieutenant to fill in our lack of knowledge, they certainly must know where we're staying. Good thinking, Eve."

Estela looked worried. "But if they've bugged your room—"

"We won't be able to do much talking, will we? Unless—"

I glanced at the Mexican girl out of the corners of my eyes. "Unless we act the way we're supposed to act—and cover up our voices by heavy breathing, yells of ecstasy and that sort of thing."

Estela made a perfect circle of her big red lips as understanding came to her. "Oh! You mean we may have to act as if—as if I really were your girl slave?"

"It may not happen," David murmured disarmingly. "If there's no bug, there's no need to put on an act."

Estela Lopez giggled. "I would not mind—so much. It would be in a good cause, *de verdad?*" Her black eyes roamed David and me with something of impish glee in their depths. "I am—how do you say it?—rather ripe for a little fun after what I've been through."

Then her face sobered. "But of course, as you say—only if the room has been bugged."

"All right then, it's agreed," announced David. "We enter the room as if we were going to have a party. We'll talk it up while we go around searching."

Ten minutes later, the Mustang turned in at the lavish motel where David and I were registered as man and wife. A little to my surprise, there was nobody in sight. Of course, it was siesta time in Tijuana, from one o'clock in the afternoon until four, but I felt sure the *terroristas* took no account of that. In something like relief, I put my arm about Estela and guided her toward our suite of rooms. David followed at our heels.

As David unlocked the door, I breathed, "Let me go first. I have my cigarette lighter in my hand."

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David nodded and reached into his shoulder holster for the .38 calibre Colt revolver he carries on dangerous assignments. Gun in his big hand, he threw open the door.

Estela was on my heels as I moved into the coolness of the air-conditioned suite. A blue carpet lay wall to wall below modernistic furniture, a couch and some chairs, a table with a lamp on it, two big blue-glass teardrops attached to a metal pole that gave off a dim radiance.

Other than its furniture, the room was empty.

Estela said, "I'm glad it was you two who bought me. You sound like fun. That man who wanted to pay a hundred thousand pesos for me was bad."

She was moving toward the table, peering under it. David growled, "I'm glad we bought you too, honey." He was studying the blue teardrops on the light-pole. I did my bit by running fingertips over the sofa, examining it with my eyes for evidence that its blue and grey velour might have been slashed to hide a bugging device inside it.

Aloud I said, "Oooh, it's so pleasant in here. What say we all have a little drinkee before we start the fun?"

"Great idea, sweetie," said my supposed husband, on his knees checking the blue carpeting. "I'll have a margarita."

"What is a margarita?" asked Estela, crouched behind one of the chairs, her policewoman's trained eyes studying it.

"You'll love it, *querida*," I told her, moving into the kitchen.

I uncorked a bottle of tequila and poured while I moved about, searching for any concealed button that would relay our voices on to a listening post. Five minutes later I had the drinks made and was reasonably certain there was no bug in here.

I set the drinks down and stepped toward the bathroom. David and Estela were searching the bedroom. They were talking as they did so, to throw any listener off the track.

"I can see all the way up your dress, honey."

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Girlish laughter. "I hope you like what you see. Us Mexican girls who come from big families can't find work so we have to let our families sell us. Sometimes, if you get a nice master and mistress, it is very enjoyable. The *menage à trois*, they call it in France."

"Come over here and give Big Daddy a kiss."

There was the sound of a juicy kiss. Piqued, I peeked into the bedroom. Estela was standing on the bed, running her fingertips behind the headboard. David Anderjanian was crouched down, peering under the bed, kissing his wrist.

I giggled. They were acting out their parts to the proverbial T. They'd even fooled me, because I thought my case officer might be getting in a little bussing along with his bug-hunting.

The bathroom contained gleaming white tiled walls, a glass-encased shower, a big bathtub, a two-basined sink in imitation veined marble, the usual potty seat and bowl. There were no windows. Instead, a ceiling fan was rotating swiftly.

No place in here for a listening device, except for—

I lifted my mini-skirt and planted my Pappagallos on the closed toilet seat. This brought my head up to the level of the electric fan. The fan was set behind a metal grille, to protect anybody who might accidentally stick his hand in the twirling blades. The blades were twirling now, because I'd turned on the light switch.

I touched the screwheads. One of them was loose. I got down, went to get a nailfile, and freed the screws. I lifted off the grille. Set just behind it was what looked like a dead insect, a big Mexican wasp.

I knew better. This was an electronic eavesdropping device. Any casual observer would believe the only thing behind the grille was a dead insect, aside from the fan itself. I replaced the grille very carefully, stepped off the toilet seat—and to let any listener think I was employing the potty seat, I flushed the bowl.

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I made a production of opening the bathroom door so the listener could hear the knob turning. These bugging devices are damn sensitive, they can be made to imitate an olive in a martini, a flower, anything small you can think of. And their miniature amplifiers can transmit a signal ten miles or more, over a telephone line. Since no telephone line was involved, I figured our eavesdroppers were very close at hand.

An expert can rig a gadget in an electric outlet—the ordinary kind that holds the switch by which you turn electric lights on or off—in a telephone, in a wristwatch, in a pen or pencil. The false wasp in the grille contained a voice actuator and a tiny antennae. It would be able to pick up the slightest noise all through our motel suite.

"You two haven't been stealing a march on me, have you?" I caroled, waving an arm at David and Estela.

They came running. My forefinger pointed at the fan grille. "In there," I barely breathed. David nodded.

Estela was giggling, saying, "Oh, no. Mrs.—ah—"

"March," said David quickly, playing up to the hidden bug. "Eve, Estela and David. One big, happy family."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" I wondered. "I'll go get the drinks. Honey, why don't you help Estela peel that dress off? It's air-conditioned in here, but I'm sure she'd be more comfortable without it."

The Mexican policewoman flushed a little, but she was game. If she had to carry on like a sex-struck peasant girl, she would go through with it. David came up behind her, kissed her smooth throat and began working the dress up her legs with his scrabbling fingers.

I paused, with a glass half-filled with ice in one hand and a frosted shaker loaded to the brim with margaritas, to study the slim brown legs that were coming into view. They were lovely, they were tinted the shade of rich cream lightly dappled with coffee.

As her thighs were bared, Estela flushed and moved a hand as if to cover herself. Out loud so the bug could hear,

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I said, "Oh, don't be bashful, honey! David and I are married and we've been around. Come on, let yourself go."

"I will try," she said bravely.

David chimed in with, "Why not give her a margarita, dear? Maybe it'll loosen her inhibitions."

A margarita, for the non-drinkers in the crowd, is made with tequila, triple sec and lemon juice. You can substitute curacao for the triple sec, if you like; we did not. Anyhow, it is a potent drink.

Estela took a sip of the chockful cocktail glass I handed her. She opened her black eyes wide, she gasped and gulped and said weakly, "Ooooh!"

David let his laugh boom out.

Under cover of the laughter I moved close to Estela and whispered, "Just what are we supposed to be looking for down here, honey?"

The Mexican girl whispered back, "You know, the *terroristas*. They are hidden away somewhere in Baja California—"

David was kissing her throat. Estela went, "Mmmm," and brushed her chin across his forehead. He asked, "Any way we have of finding them?"

Estela murmured so low only I could hear her, "Their leader is a devil named 'el oro', the gold one. He is a blond man, very big, very strong."

David had her dress up to her hip bones. She was pretty sexy, standing like that, with just her privacy hidden by the loop of the cheap, sun-worn gingham rag she called a dress. I handed David a drink, he reached for it with his left hand; his right was sliding under the upraised skirt.

Estela gasped, eyes wide. She writhed a little, murmuring deep in her throat. I gathered from her look that she was not exactly acting for the electronic eavesdropper. David was really getting to her.

David sipped, I sipped, our girl slave drank.

She blew out air with a somewhat dazed look, handing me the glass for a refill. I grinned as I shook my head. I

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didn't want her passing out. Not until we learned some more about *el oro*, anyhow.

I felt left out of the action. The hand that was under her dress was moving around, fingers working, while the policewoman panted. She was rubbing her inner thighs together, she was blinking her long-lashed eyelids up and down. Her thick black hair had come loose from the knot in which she had fastened it, tumbling about her shoulders.

"Where can we find him?" I mouthed at the girl.

"Mmmm-hmmmm," she went, turning in David's arms and plastering herself up against his big body. Her red mouth came open, lifted toward the lips David Anderjanian offered her.

There was no sense expecting her to talk with her lips and tongue deep in David's mouth. I sipped my margarita, felt jealous, and decided to give the little girl a hand, under her upraised skirt.

She grunted as my fingernails lightly scratched her smooth buttocks, trailing all the way around each plump cheek and in between. My fingertips tickled and caressed her flesh, they almost drove her wild. I could see her own fingernails digging into David's shoulders through his shirt as her hips began a rhythmic rubbing against his front.

"Where?" I whispered, crowding my loins against her rear.

She broke off the kiss, panting harshly. Three times she had to swallow before she dared trust herself to speak. We were all conscious of that listening bug. We did not dare smash it, because that would have tipped off the listener that we damn well weren't what we professed to be, a married American couple down here for a *seance à trois* with a pretty Mexican slavegirl.

"N-north of Mulege," she finally said.

Then she flung herself at David again.

"*Lo haremos?*" she panted. "Shall we do it? Shall we?"

She was giving a great performance for the benefit of the

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unseen eavesdropper. Or maybe it wasn't an act. She was moving like a serpent all over David, her hands were in between their bodies, I couldn't see what she was doing with them, but David was getting that glazed look that always contorts his face when he is about to do a mount.

I hadn't learned very much, yet—except that Estela Lopez had a low boiling point for margaritas and David Anderjanian. I knew about Mulege, it is a little town on the gulf of California, with the Sierra de Lagiganta mountains towering up behind it. It is real wild country, back of Mulege. A great place for *terroristas*, if not for *touristas*.

"Hey, don't forget me," I complained.

David was gripping the worn, faded gingham in his big Viking hands, his arm and shoulder muscles were bulging, and the sound of that ripping gingham was loud in the living room. I could see the brown, creamy skin of the Mexican girl all the way to her behind. She had nothing on but the dress.

"You tore my dress," she wailed, then stifled a giggle behind a palm.

David grated, "Hell, we'll buy you a dozen more, won't we, Eve?"

"Sure," I agreed like a dutiful wife on a three-way orgy. "Don't fret, Estela. But why don't I get in on the fun?"

I walked up behind Estela, she was naked in the rear as the dress fell in flaps from her upper arms, and passed my left hand around her waist, under the dress. In my right hand I held my cocktail. I offered it to the girl while I began a southpaw search across her smooth belly, teasingly, down into the wiry tangle of her pubic hair.

She gasped, sipped, and moaned.

I stepped back, lifting my hands to the torn remnants of the gingham dress on Estela's otherwise bare shoulders. My fingers tightened in the stuff and drew it down. I stared past Estela's bared shoulder at David Anderjanian.

His whistle was loud, admiring, as the gingham fell to reveal her smooth brown shoulders, then slipped slightly

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so her left breast was all but nude. In the mirror above the imitation fireplace, I could see her reflection. Her breast was full, heavy, tipped with a large purple nipple. It quivered slightly as she moved, bobbling lazily.

"Kiss it, David," I urged, for the benefit of the bugging device.

David opened his lips, bent down. I watched the stiffened teat slide in between his lips, heard him make loud sucking noises to cover up my words as I leaned my lips against the ear hidden behind her long black hair.

"Where does he hole up, this *el oro*?"

The Mexican girl moaned. Her fingers had caught David, held his head, moved his mouth deeper into her heavy breast so the flesh bulged around his lips. I repeated my question, pinching her right buttock.

"Oh, oh," she was gasping.

Then a little of her sanity came back. She turned her lips to me, began to speak. Her eyes were half closed, but behind her long black lashes I could see the glitter of her eyes.

"Not far from the desert, he has a place, a little camp. The *desierto de Vizciano*, it is called, along the southern part. And a place in the San Ignacio mountains, too. He comes and—aaggh!"

She was practically collapsing from what David was doing to her. I sighed and decided it wasn't any use asking her more questions. She was in no condition to answer them. Curiosity would have to wait on concupiscence.

I ran into the bathroom, got up on the toilet seat, turned my back on the grillework, and undid my zipper. It made a nice metallic noise. Up this close to the bug, it must have sounded like a landslide of crackling metal chunks. Maybe it even deafened them a little.

A swift glance in the mirror showed me the policewoman standing naked to her bellybutton with David kissing everything in view. His hands were tugging down the rest of her skirt, so that the mirror and I got a fine view

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of her plump brown buttocks, quivering gently as she went on rubbing her thighs together and moaning.

"You're cheating on me," I shouted into the grille. "I can see you in the mirror. Ooooh, David—you never did *that to me!*"

That blasted their eeky little eardrums, I'll bet!

It might also get their minds off spying while they were trying to imagine what David was doing to the slavegirl that he hadn't done to his wife.

My fingers yanked up the hem of my David Crystal A-liner.

"Whooooops!" I screeched at the grille, "Here I come!"

I draped the dress over the grille, to make it harder for the boys in the next room to hear. Then I turned and ran for the bedroom wearing nothing but my Olga garterbelt and sheer black nylons.

CHAPTER TWO

Every little group needs a leader. I appointed myself head mistress as I raced toward David Anderjanian, on his knees and kissing all around the brown belly going in and out like a bellows as Estela panted. We were all of us too far along the pleasure path to hold back now, I decided. Even I was having a bout of anties in the panties, though I wasn't wearing any.

My A-line dress hanging in front of the grille would deaden our sounds a little. Sure, I could have turned on the shower or closed the bathroom door but I didn't want the man at the other end of the bug to grow suspicious. They must think we really were an American couple here for kicks.

I began kissing the policewoman down her smooth back while my hands went around in front to find and fondle her rockhard breasts. She was panting out loud now. I wondered if they could hear her through the dacron material.

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"The delight delta, David," I panted.

"Huh? Oh, yeah—sure!"

"Wha—what is th-that?" sobbed the Mexican girl.

I drew her toward the bed, gently. "You'll see, honey." My voice rose an octave as I explained, "David and I have studied the foremost erotologists of the world. We've translated the intricacies of the-stag-with-a-herd-of-does positions, which are recommended by Vatsyayana for the pleasure of one man and two or more women, into the ordinary lingo of the street. For our own needs naturally."

She had her glazed eyes fastened on mine. I don't think she understood a word I said. Her gorgeous *café au lait* body was geared in only one direction. So I shoved her backward onto the bed.

David took the hint. He leaped from a couple of feet away, bracing his landing on knees and his big palms. Estela reached down and guided him. I studied their plunging, twisting bodies for a minute or two before joining them. First, the delta-of-delight, then the search-for-the-hiding-tiger, followed by the urn position.

After that I would—

I bit my lip. I could think later. Right now—

My hand slapped David on his hip. He fell onto his side as if he were a well-trained husband, taking the convulsing Estela right along with him. I got between them, fastening my lipsticked mouth onto the Mexican girl's left breast, fitting my thighs about the head of my supposed husband.

I could talk to Estela, this way.

"Tell me more about *el oro*," I panted, kissing her rockhard breast.

"N-n-now?" she wailed, hips going mad.

"Mmm-hmm," I replied, licking her nipple.

"I c-can't!" she screeched.

"Not so loud, honey. Yeah, I know what's happening, but we have to do it this way. The other side is listening in, remember?"

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She was a well-trained policewoman. She panted out her answers while all three of us were going over the whoopee waterfall.

"He has—a s-second in command n-named *al raton*. He ha-has one eye, the other is hidden under a patch . . . ohhh! Wha— what I'm trying to say is, *el oro* and this Mouse are both da-dangerous."

We had to pause here because the policewoman was being a woman, yowling and shuddering and screaming with her lips wide open. I was joining her, prisoning David between my soft upper thighs so he could hardly breathe.

We quieted down, so I suggested we shift into the urn position with David flat on his back, me riding rantipole on him while he paid lip service to Estela. This let me kiss her swollen red lips and talk to her in between kisses.

"They are training men to be terrorists. They have these camps in the desert and in the mountain. You un-understand? Oh, please understand! I cannot g-go on t-talking and tick-tacking at the sa-same time—*no me atormentes mas!*"

So I stopped tormenting her. I devoted myself to the enjoyment we were all feeling. From the urn we formed the hunter-looking-for-the-hiding-tiger, the eternal circle (this is kind of complicated and is mighty tough on the spine as you roll over and over), and half a dozen others that came to my mind in bursts of isomulciastic inspiration.

We collapsed on the floor about two and a half hours later. We lay there, pooped out, our bodies covered with sweat. I reached over and patted David on his chest. The sweat was giving me an idea.

"Shower," I mumbled. "Make a lot of noise."

"Yeah," he grunted. "See what you mean."

He got up and staggered for the bathroom. He closed the door and turned on the water, full force. It would seem to any listener that the bug was hidden under Niagara

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Falls. The closed door would prevent any remote possibility of the eavesdroppers hearing what Estela and I said.

It was perfectly normal for a man to take a shower after such a sex session. It would arouse no suspicion. I rolled over on my front, shook the policewoman with a hand on her shoulder.

"It's safe to talk, Estela. Tell me more."

"You know about *terroristas*?" she asked faintly, eyes opening tiredly.

I knew all about them. It is part of my job. From the *el asifa* terrorists of the Arab world, through the feyadeen who fought for Gamal Nasser a dozen years ago, the Viet Cong fanatics, the Red Guards of Mao Tse-tung's China, I knew the men who scattered terror as other men sow seeds.

"Red China is training these men," Estela said.

I did a double-take. I knew that Peking money was behind the training of Tanzanians in Africa to make racial war in the United States and to spread their guerilla tactics into Rhodesia, Malawi, and South Africa. It might be part and parcel of that plan, this one in Mexico.

The policewoman nodded, smiling faintly at me as her head rolled sideways so that her cheek rested on the pile. "Yes, they hope to start many little wars in your country. From the big cities, from the southwest. It is not so far-fetched as you may think. The snipers operating during your riots are only the first few troops going into action."

The Red Chinese did not want a war with the United States. Not for them the atom bombs that hit Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Their ways were more insidious. In Africa, Peking planned to split that continent in half by taking over control in the Congo, eastward through Uganda and Kenya, westward to include Conga-Brazzaville and Gabon. Banded together with the Communist Arab world, they would run through Rhodesia and South Africa like a tidal wave over an atoll.

Why go to war when there were other ways to win your

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objective? The Communist is a sworn enemy of the ideals of the western world. He is dedicated to the fight against capitalism, always before him like a war flag. If Communism can take over Africa in such a manner, why not use those same tactics against the United States of America? It might not be as easy, it would take years, but now was as good a time as any to make a beginning.

"The camps of *el oro* are the seedlings from which the terror tree will sprout," Estela told me. "There the Gold One and the Mouse are training raw recruits in the *terrorista* activities. Che Guevara sought to do this same thing in Bolivia before the police reached out and killed him. They are all tarred with the same brush. Castro! Guevara! El oro! They take Red Chinese gold to do their fighting for them, as the North Koreans and the Viet Cong take Russian gold to fight the Russians' war."

From his camp, the Gold One would send out his excellently trained troopers to establish other centers of insurrection. They would not strike openly until they were very strong. They would turn Mexico against her northern neighbor, they would cut off Aztec-land from those countries south of the Panama Canal.

Insurrection. Killing. Murder. Riots. Looting. It was the way of the *terrorista*. And when the United States moved to halt these depredations by sending troops into Mexico, Red China would scream aggression and threaten to launch a war against it.

Would those hysterical threats succeed? Would the United States let itself be bluffed into a defensive position before the United Nations, be forced to explain its actions against these organized killers and looters? True, the United Nations had no power, but it did serve as a sounding-board for propaganda and it was a mirror held up to the world by which its nations might see their neighbors.

"Tell me who will sit in the White House," said Estela, "and I will tell you what course your country will take."

What she was telling me was frightening, and not at all

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far-out. In Guatemala City, the Fueszas Armadas Rebeldes and the Movimiento Revolucionario, groups of Communist terrorists, were already burning, killing and looting. They shoot down government officials in the streets, they kidnap men in important positions. Quite recently, they had even machine-gunned down United States Ambassador John Gordon Mien, along the Avenida la Reforma.

"*La violencia* in Guatemala will spread to Mexico if you don't stop *el oro*," the Mexican girl told me grimly. "The Communists have drawn up a list of more than fifty names of prominent men to be liquidated in Central America. Eight of them have been assassinated at last count. There may be more victims, by this time."

A cold chill was running up and down my spine. These were no simple bandidos with whom David and I had to deal. They were killers, fanatics, and they were employing science against the cause for which we stood—liberty and freedom for men, everywhere—as they had probably been trained to do in Red China.

"Where would you suggest we begin?" I asked.

"In the village of the dead, not far from San Ignacio. I do not know its connection with the terrorists, but *el pueblo del muertos* is used by them, from time to time. Our agents have reported this, before they disappeared."

Estela smiled wryly and shrugged, "Me, I would be afraid to go there. I admit it. I would go if ordered, but I would be afraid. Very much afraid."

This made two of us. I shivered and slapped her flank. "Come on, honey—let's go wash up. You take your shower while I clue David in on what you've told me."

David was singing a loose version of *O Sole Mio* in the shower. If the eavesdropper in the next room were a music lover, he would be wincing in his boots right about now, as I opened the bathroom door to a crescendo of off-key notes that sounded as though they were being bellowed by a bull in pain.

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My crooking finger signaled him. He left the shower going so its cascading waters would drown out the sound of our whispered words.

"Gotta talk to you," I informed him as he stepped from the glass-enclosed shower to reach for a towel.

"Be with you," he nodded.

A somewhat shy Estela Lopez came into the bathroom then, dimpling a smile at David, flushing more than somewhat. After the intimacies the three of us had shared, you might think she wouldn't blush, but what she had done had been in the heat of passion. Now she was back in her normal state, emotionally speaking.

She slipped past David into the shower.

I caught David by his hand and lead him out of the steamy room. We could talk better in the livingroom, where my case officer would not be distracted by the moving shadow of a naked policewoman.

I poured margaritas, and we talked.

Our plan of action was simple. Somehow we had to make contact with the terrorists, and one or both of us had to become a part of the Commie group. Since we had to start somewhere, I suggested *el pueblo des muertes*.

"We know the terrorists are using it," I said, sitting my bare behind on a bar stool. "We know damn little else. If you have any better suggestions, be my guest and make them."

"No, no, I'm with you," David agreed. "If we could pose as discontented Americanos, we might have a chance." His fingers jabbed at the bathroom. "If we're not recognized by the enemy. They've seen us at the slave auction, they've heard our voices. They'd be damn fools if they weren't suspicious of a man and wife turning their backs on their own country and coming down here."

"We don't join them as man and wife," I shook my head. "We're going to have to change the image."

"As how?"

My scarlet fingernail pointed at him. "You shall be a

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hobo bum, I'll be your hoboette. We've wandered down into Mexico because the cops are after us for a heist job we didn't do. We're desperate, we have exactly eleven cents on us. You have six pennies. I have a nickel."

David made a face. He likes his body bliss as much as I. No more ice-cold cocktails, no more soft beds, no more running around in a fire-engine-red Mustang. It would be bare feet scuffling in the dust, the hard ground to sleep on, fetid water to drink.

Yech!

But—oh, hell! The *terroristas* survive on such fare. No reason why we couldn't at least exist. Like, man, it might be a gasser.

The bathroom door opened. Estela Lopez came out in a fluffy bath towel wrapped about her *café au lait* nudity. She was scented with some of my expensive Joy, but I figured this was a kind of beginning for my coming role as a road moll. I had to make some sacrifices! I was next. I stood up, stretched, and padded bare-ass into the bathroom. I stuck my tongue out at the hidden bug.

Estela had shut off the shower water. I turned it on, adjusted it, reached for a cake of soap and began lathering the Drum bod. This would be the last time in a long while I would enjoy such a luxury, I told myself. I might as well make the most of it.

So I luxuriated in the shower for half an hour. I scrubbed everything in sight, and some things that weren't. I practically gleamed when I stepped out onto the bathmat and began drying my pelt. I doused myself in Joy perfume, too.

When I came out, letting the shower run, David was mixing more margaritas and our pretty policewoman was sitting on a bar stool admiring him. He wore his boxer shorts, she was ravishing in a pair of red nylon panties and a matching bra. Mine.

"Estela's promised to have the police protect our clothes while we're gone," David announced. "Estela will

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drive us as near to the village of the dead as she dares, so as not to arouse suspicion. The police will pass the word that we have been lost in the wilds of Baja California, and will confiscate our possessions, including the Mustang."

"We'll hold them until you come back," the girl nodded, accepting a margarita from my case officer. She hesitated, then added dryly. "If you come back. This is very dangerous work you do."

"All my work is dangerous," I told her.

She was hung up over David. You could read the admiration in her bright eyes as she stared at him. I glowered a little. I do not mind sharing my perfume and my scanties with another woman, but I damn well do object to letting her have my boy friend all the time. What went on before, in our *seance à trois*, was in the line of duty. But enough was enough.

I stood up, I swallowed my drink.

"I'm tired," I announced. "Come on, David. Let's us go to bed."

Estela got up and slipped a bare arm about me. "I'm for it, honey. Let's all go to bed."

I wanted to tell her to flake off, but we had bought her as a slave and it might seem funny to the listeners-in if we shoved her out into the Mexican dusk. I let the Drum shoulders move up and down in a shrug.

"Got to shut off the water, first. Can't let the boys next door get too suspicious of us. I mean, how clean can we get, after all?"

I shut off the water while David walked the Mexican girl into the bedroom. I came at their heels, studying Estela in the red panties and the way her buttocks jiggled as she walked, also taking in David as the policewoman started shoving down his boxer shorts.

Maybe this was why I saw the bump in the rug, close to one of the bed legs. My mind was on bulges, I guess. The rug bulge didn't mean a thing to me while I was letting my

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towel slide down, but when I bent to pick it off the floor, my eyes got wide.

"Wheee," I said out loud as David turned to stare at me.

I was not admiring my case officer's physical proportions. I was merely giving vent to my excitement. I got down on my hands and knees, scrabbling up the rug until I could see what was making that bump.

It was another bug, cleverly hidden where it might never be noticed if I hadn't been bending over to pick up my towel. I pointed at it and David looked a little sick.

Our fun with the bug in the bathroom was a lot of wasted effort. The boys next door must have heard enough to make them more than suspicious of us. It was almost right over this second bug that the policewoman and I had been exchanging information along with our intimacies.

I motioned David and Estela to go on with what they had been doing. They went at it half-heartedly, while they watched me move to my valise and lift out the little pearl-handled Belgian Bulldog revolver that has been my confidante on a number of assignments.

I put a forefinger to my lips and moved, stark naked as I was, to the bedroom window. I threw it up and some of the muggy Mexican night blew into the bedroom. I extended a slim white leg over the sill and climbed out. I stood on a small walkway that bounded the motel on its rear.

There was a high, wide-slatted fence stretching along the walk; it hid everything taking place at the rear of the motel from the roadway. I listened for sounds from the road beyond the fence, but the night was very still.

I stepped toward the room next to ours.

A shadow moved toward the window in the room beyond ours. I drew back, pressing my behind into the motel wall. The window came up. A hand that held a hand grenade came into view, resting on the window sill. Then a trousered leg stuck itself out of the open window.

"Don't make any mistakes," somebody in the room said.

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The man in the window muttered, "You worry too much. I never make mistakes. Wait. You will see."

I crouched, putting my revolver down on the cement path. Then I got up, pivotted on my bare right foot, and sent the toes of my left into the mid-section of the man in the window.

He let out a yell and toppled backwards into the room. In almost the same motion, my hands stabbed out and wrenched the grenade away from him.

I pulled the pin. I counted ten.

The two men inside the room were staring at me with ashen faces. One of the *terroristas* was on the floor, flat on his back, his companion was crouched near the receiving end of his bugging apparatus. The man on the floor had been on his way to our window, to hurl his grenade into our bedroom. His buddy had cautioned him not to make any mistakes. I felt no pity for either of them, it was their lives or ours.

I hurled the grenade between them and dropped flat on my belly.

Half the motel seemed to blow up.

I gagged and gasped as the shock waves beat past me. Then I was up and running for my bedroom window where David was already poking his head out.

"What the hell!" he rasped.

I shoved him out of the way, climbed back in and turned to shut and lock the window. "I met one of our neighbors with a hand grenade. I beat him to the firing pin."

Estela sat on the edge of the bed, looking even sicker than David who was saying, "It might have been us. If you hadn't spotted that bug . . ."

The girl said, "The police will be here soon. What shall I tell them?"

"Nothing. You don't know anything about the *terroristas* or how clumsy they can be when they handle things

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like grenades. They are tricky things, hand grenades. A man can make a mistake by pulling out the pin too soon."

She smiled faintly as I spoke. Then she nodded her head. "Yes, they will think that way. It will not be the first time a terrorist has killed himself instead of his intended victim. We police understand about such things."

"But we'd better get rid of our bugs, right?" I asked.

There was no reason now for us to put on an act. Our eavesdroppers were dead. And if the police found no bugs in our suite, they could not suspect us. Estela Lopez would make her report to her superiors, of course, and the matter would be handled on a higher plane than at the local station house.

I went to my valise and lifted out a sheath dress, tossing it to Estela. "Better put this on, honey. I think your fellow officers will be more receptive to our pleas of innocence if we wear clothes while we explain that we are in a state of shock over that awful explosion."

We got dressed. We were huddled in the living room when a policeman pressed the bell. David and I staged a little argument the way a husband and wife might when the wife is so scared she doesn't want her husband to open the door if the man beyond it keeps shouting that he is from the *guardia de policia*.

When he was finally admitted, the harassed policeman was sweating with worry. In Tijuana the state of business relies on American tourist good will. Blowing up motel rooms is not conducive to the warm, cosy feeling that should flow through all American *touristas* in Mexico. It is a bad thing, a bad thing, he kept saying, as he jotted down our story in his little book.

Estela did not identify herself. She was from Mexico City, and was unknown to her fellow police officers this far to the northwest. Besides, I got the feeling that she looked down her pretty nose at her country cousin, so to speak. She was very police, she answered all his queries, she even

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suggested the police hush this up so it would not interfere with the tourist trade.

The officer nodded agreeably at this idea. The merchants paid his salary and that of his fellow policemen, he wanted to keep the merchants happy. It would be as they said, it was an unfortunate accident, one more instance of the clumsy blood-thirstiness of those damned *terroristas*.

The door closed gently.

David said hopefully, "Anybody for bed?"

Estela and I looked at each other. I think the excitement had stimulated all of us. We nodded, smiling. David helped us to our feet. His arm about both our waists, he led us in to the waiting bedroom.

My Movado wristwatch read: 10:57.

We made love combinations until dawn was a pink tint on the windows. I think David and I were trying to get as much fun as we could before the deadly seriousness of our assignment had us in its spell. There would be no love-ins where we were going, just dry hot air and dust, parched throats and dirty bodies. In the tradition of the condemned man eating a hearty last meal, we feasted all night long.

Estela kept pace with us. She was on her way back to her job as policewoman in Mexico City, and a *seance à trois* was no part of her duties. She kept urging us on to bigger and better efforts all during the night hours, her brown body a satin succubus that roused and pleased and satiated, again and again and again.

We finally fell asleep, twined about one another.

It was close to noon when we woke.

I blinked my eyelids against the day, thinking about where I was going. Ruefully I glanced at the closet filled with my clothes, my shoes, and my new mink jacket. The sheer nylons and my fancy underwear in the two big valises which bore my name—or at least, the name under which I was going as David's wife—would be just a memory out there in the *desierto de Vizcaino*.

I slid my naked legs out of bed. Estela was lying on her

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front, cheek sunk into a pillow, breathing slowly, still in dreamland. David was in the shower, I could hear his voice over the splashing waters.

We needed old clothes. I could use the torn gingham thing Estela had been wearing, but we had to get something for David to make him look like a barrel stiff. I sighed, making it to my feet. It was always something.

An hour later Estela was tooling the red Mustang along the highway from Tijuana to Ensenada. This is an excellent road, it skirts the coast, it offers a view of cirio trees and cholla cactus, of bare dirt and distant mountains. We enjoyed it while we could, knowing what was coming.

"Ensenada will be a kind of jumping-off place," Estela informed us. "The road is paved a little way below that, but mostly, from then on, it is dirt. And sometimes the road disappears completely so it will seem as if we are driving across open country."

"Sounds like hell," David grouched.

"It is," the policewoman nodded. She was wearing one of my Kay Windsor dresses, and one of my prettiest panty and brassiere combos, of sheer black nylon with red satin bows. I know. I had watched her get dressed.

Her gingham dress was in the trunk, together with a pair of patched pants and a torn shirt David had paid a junkman for, ten minutes after leaving Tijuana. We were going to pose as hobos so we might as well look like tramps.

"How far do we go in the car?" I groaned.

"About four hundred and twenty miles, give or take a dozen one way or the other," Estela chuckled.

"You sound pretty happy about this," David growled.

"I warned you. You would not listen. However, if you have changed your minds, I will be glad to turn back."

"Keep going," I moaned.

We spent the night—nobody but nobody can take four hundred miles of Baja California in a car at one stretch—in a small goat ranch, along with the goats and their owner, a grinning Indian named Monte. For an American

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dollar each he fed us frijoles and eggs for supper, and tortillas for breakfast. I was pleasantly surprised at how tasty they were.

The ground became rough under our tires now, and sharply graded. The Mustang was laboring as the dirt road bounced away behind us. Estela did the driving not only because she knew the country but she had driven half her life on hard-dirt roads like this one.

"I will have to buy new tires for you when I get back to Tijuana," she informed us. "and it might even be a good idea to buy a whole new car. This country takes it out of an engine in big chunks."

"We'll let the General worry about that," David grinned. "You just get us where we want to go, and then get yourself safely home. That's all we ask."

On the evening of the third day since leaving Tijuana, the Mexican girl braked the car and gestured to her left. My eyes ran over an infinity of sand and cactus, rocks and sand, and an occasional clump of mesquite trees, sweet pitahaya and other species of things that grow only in the desert.

"It's all yours," she murmured pityingly.

David got out. He went around to the back of the car, unlocked the trunk and began stripping down. Both he and I had sneakers for the role we were to play, which had been contributed by Estela Lopez. She had bought them off a peddler's cart in Ensenada. They were worn and dirty, but this was all to the good. We were tramps, the two of us, and those spotted, dirty Keds would help us act out our roles.

When David came out into view in his torn pants and ripped shirt, with a frayed straw sombrero to keep the sun off his head, I went to the trunk, slipped off my dress, undid my brassiere and lifted it away from my bouncing beauties. I pushed down my panties, undid my garters and rolled down my hose. I stripped naked, in other words.

The sun was damn hot on my skin so I slid into the

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gingham dress as quickly as I could. Estela had stuck safety pins in it, here and there, to make it more or less modest. Then I put on my sneakers. I let down my blonde hair so it fell around my shoulders.

David whooped when he saw me and Estela smiled.

"You will be the road moll, all right," she murmured. "The dirtiest, sloppiest lady tramp I've ever seen—and I've dealt with more than one."

I grinned, "Then you don't think I should smear dirt on my face?"

Her hand indicated the *desierto*. "One hour of walking on that under the sun and there will be dirt all over you." She turned and reached into the back seat and lifted out two big canteens.

"Take these, they're filled with water. Oh, yes—and these, too." She handed David his six pennies, and me my nickel. "I shall keep your things safe, my friends. Nobody shall come near them, except me."

"Just don't wear out all my clothes," I smiled.

She nodded, then whispered, "*Vaya con Dios!*"

A minute later she and the red Mustang were a cloud of dust moving northward. I looked at David, then at the rim of the *dieserto de Vizcaino*. He looked as depressed as I felt.

"Let's get going," he muttered. "We'll walk by night, when it'll be cooler. That way, we ought to make better time."

"How far away is the village of the dead?"

"About twelve miles."

We began walking.

In two hours, I was wet with sweat. My legs, up to my knees, which is as far as I bothered to look, were dirty. I looked like the last dreg in the barrel. I trudged on without complaining. David wouldn't have listened to my laments, anyhow. Besides, he looked just as awful as I did.

It grew purple with dusk on the first few foothills of the Sierra Columbia mountains, just where the edge of the

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desert touches them. This is mostly unexplored country, in here. Nobody has set foot in these hills or on this sand in over a century, if ever. It could hide a forgotten kingdom of the Aztec, for all I knew.

The *terroristas* had picked a great place to train their recruits, I had to give them that much. There were no prying eyes—except ours, of course—to spy on them, no voice to tell them *si* or *non*. They were kings of the hill in these mountains and on the desert. Who else but fanatics and secret agents would show their faces in this forsaken corner of Hades?

We walked for three more hours. My legs were shaking with weakness, and I've always kept my body in tiptop shape. There is something about walking in the wilderness, slogging along on stones and dirt and sand, that sure takes it out of you. It damn well took it out of me and left it on my backtrail in drops of sweat that seemed like blood on my fevered imagination.

If it was like this at night, with the stars over head and a faint breeze moving past the pitahaya trees—what in the name of God was it like in the daylight? The sun beating down, the heat, the parched throats . . .

I wanted to go home to my city apartment.

My feet kept me walking in the long shadow the moon threw from David Anderjanian to the ground. I sighed and shifted the canteen strap on my all but bare shoulders. The canteen felt as if it weighed a ton.

"How far've we gone?" I wondered out loud.

"Eight, maybe eight and a half miles."

"In five hours?" I wailed.

"Tough walking up and down. Keep the old chin up, Eve. There's worse to come, remember."

"My chin is not old," I stated coldly.

David can get me mad with the silliest things. I stalked on angrily for another hour without speaking. I watched David dully as he stopped on the crown of a hill and stared through the night to the south and east. It was dead, silent,

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beyond the crest of the hill. The wind moaned through the *cardon* trees like spirit voices whispering of terror to be found behind that darkness.

I shivered all over. I wanted to tell David to turn around, to go back the way we had come. The Baja peninsula is a seven-hundred-mile-long finger thrusting southward out of California, parting the waters of the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of California. Only at a few places are there what an American girl would call any touches of civilization. The rest of it is barren dirt and rock and desert fauna.

It is a lot of country in which to be so out of touch with the niceties of life. Anything could happen here. And likely would, I thought glumly as I followed David down the far side of the hill. There were no police out this far, here you were on your own.

I found myself admiring the cleverness of the Red Chinese bosses who had picked this spot to train the terrorists they had selected to work for them. If it hadn't been for the lucky break that tipped off Estela Lopez to their existence, they would have been able to take over this whole peninsula before anybody knew what was happening.

We trudged on. At last, by night, the sun did not cook me into a travesty of a female. All my damage was on the inside, where I ached in every direction.

I had to have a drink. I stopped stumbling, swayed until I recovered my balance, and tilted my canteen on my lips. It was then that I saw the dead man.

CHAPTER THREE

He was standing on a nearby hill, staring at us.

Only the whites of his eyes were showing. No pupils, just the bulging whiteness turned in our direction. His clothes were rotted, they stunk of the grave as the wind blew toward me.

I gagged, nauseous. I needed to retch. I needed even more to call out a warning to David who was plodding on unconcernedly ahead of me, staring at the ground. I couldn't do either one.

The dead man turned and shuffled away, bare feet kicking pebbles where he stepped. That loosed the old vocal chords. I opened my mouth and let my screech shrill up from the bottom of my heels.

David whirled and came running. His hand held his Colt revolver, shining blue steel in the pre-dawn light. "Eve—what is it?"

"A d-dead man! O-over th-there!"

I pointed, telling him how it was. David nodded grimly.

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"Good, means we're on the right track. Estela was right. There is a village of the dead nearby. Let's go find it."

I tried to think of reasons why we should bypass *el pueblo del muertos*, but scratch my think tank as I would, I couldn't summon up even one. So I followed my case officer like a dog at heel for about half an hour.

We could see the dead thing out there a hundred feet ahead of us, lurching along. David said something about using him as a guide, because he went after him, practically stepping in his footprints. I weaved back and forth, trying to do the same thing where David was concerned.

The village came into view just as the dawn redness was tinting the desert all around us. It was a ghost town, all right. There was nothing living in it. A movie prop man might have built it for a western horror film. There were half a dozen buildings, tumbled-down with age and the awesome heat of the Baja sun. False-fronts, a few stone walls, a rickety tie-rail, two places that had been saloons, and that was the village of the dead.

It was dusty, rotted, a wreck of something that had known life a long time ago. I wondered who had built it, and when. A branch of the ragtag army that had followed Pancho Villa? Maybe.

The dead man staggered ahead of us down the street.

As he passed each building, more dead things came to the doors of those buildings and looked at us. David slowed his walk and waited for me.

"What in hell are those things?" I croaked.

"They're zombies," he told me hoarsely.

"Yeah, zombies," I nodded.

His glance sneered at my intelligence. "Don't you understand? Cuba works hand in glove with Red China. Haitian emigrants who fear Papa Doc Duvalier escape from Haiti and take refuge in Cuba. You can read about them every day in the papers."

"And Haiti is where the zombies flourish," I nodded.

A zombie is a man or woman who has been fed drugs

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until he assumes the look of a dead person. They can feel no pain, they obey blindly, they walk with a shuffle on flat feet. They have no will, no mind of their own. They are not truly dead, as the voodooist would have you believe; they are merely drugged.

It may seem odd, but these living dead men fitted into their present background. In Mexico, the people seem obsessed with death, and with the materials of the grave. There is a national Day of the Dead, in which *fiesta* is held and one can buy candy skulls and skeletons to eat, or *papier-mache* figurines of dead bodies that hide little jars filled with sweets. There are masks of dead people to be worn, bread baked in the shapes of shroud-wrapped mummies to be eaten, and dirge-like music to listen to. Maybe it is a reminder of the religious adage that man is dust and into dust he shall return.

It gives me the creeps.

Living or dead, these shuffling, moping things scared the hell out of me. Their faces were ashen, their eyes were only bulging orbs of utter whiteness as they moved toward us. They carried no weapons, their hands and bodies were the only weapons they needed.

David was still holding his revolver.

"Shoot them," I whispered.

They were part of the *terroristas*. They were enemy agents, in my eyes. I guess David felt the same way, because he raised the Colt, aimed, and blasted a hole in the man nearest him.

The man kept coming. I think I screamed. In fact I know damn well I did because my mouth was wide open and my tongue was vibrating right along with my vocal cords when a hand dropped on my shoulder.

I saw David drive a fist into the belly of another living dead man even as I whirled, grabbed the wrist of my own attacker and swung my bod into the captured-arm hip throw. I pulled down and around, hitting the zombie with my hip and lifting him off his feet. He was flying through

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the air while I was reaching for a woman coming at me with upraised hands, long nails ready to claw my face.

My hand-edge took her across the neck.

She toppled sideways as two men jumped me, pinning my arms against their chests. They lifted me so the toes of my feet just touched the ground.

I guess they figured I was helpless, but I still had my gams. I sent one foot into the mid-section of a woman, the heel of the other foot into the face of a man. Both stumbled backwards.

David was trying to box with the zombies, and getting nowhere. His sledgehammer fists would thud home—I heard them go thumpa-thumpa-thump—but they paid no attention to the blows. They kept on coming, walking with that staggering shuffle which was a mark of the drugs in their systems.

Hell! If a .38 slug wouldn't stop them, his fist sure couldn't.

I could hear my case officer cursing.

He tried to wrestle with them, hurling them sideways and away, so their bodies went flying through the air. There were too many of them. David just wore himself out. It was like trying to overcome a dozen heavyweight punching bags on legs.

My feet were flying back and forth as I tried to kick a pathway to the empty hills around us. The living dead men holding my arms finally got the idea because one of them caught my blonde hair and yanked it back, making me yip to the pain and effectively preventing me from aiming with my sneakered feet.

A woman grabbed my legs, hung on.

I was panting, sobbing. My arms felt sore from being pulled from their sockets, my legs were dead weights where the woman clung. Estela's gingham dress was in tatters by this time, and tears of pain were streaking my cheeks.

I fought to free my arms, writhing and twisting.

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The men on either side of me were too strong. Besides, they felt no pain as I dragged my fingernails along their flesh. The woman was kneeling on the ground, and her arms about my thighs felt like a boa constrictor tightening its coils.

It was all I could do to breathe.

David was in little better shape. He was battering away, but a man was perched on his back, legs wrapped about his lean middle, and the man was hammering the top of his head with a fist. In front of him another zombie was hitting his chest, both hands finger-linked to form a fleshy club. Those frontal blows were driving him backwards as the man seated on his back overbalanced his muscle-strutted body.

He hit the ground on his spine, showering dust.

Though he still continued to thresh about, the fight was over for my fellow L.U.S.T. operative. He was practically exhausted. After a nine-mile hike, to run into a bunch of grave knaves like this was something else again.

I was flung down beside him and a woman came to kneel over me while a lot of hands held me motionless. She tied my ankles and my wrists together. Then I was yanked upward, tossed over the shoulder of a living dead man, and carried off.

I had no idea where I was being taken.

All I could see from my upside-down position was big David Anderjanian, tied the same way I was, as his trussed-up body was slung onto a pole. Two of the biggest zombies caught the ends of the pole and lifted him up.

We were lugged down the single street of *el pueblo del muertos*, toward a hill at the far end. I figured we were going to be shot and our bodies dumped out of sight. Or maybe they were going to turn us into the living dead, to swell their ranks.

No such luck!

I did not see what was on the other side of the hill since my backside was facing in that direction. Only when the

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zombie carrying me over his shoulder let me fall to the rocky ground, did I see the open coffins.

My scream could have cracked windows a mile away.

David heard me, turned his head, craning to see. His face went white. He catches on; he realized that we were going to be buried alive.

"God in heaven," he breathed.

His arm muscles rippled as he fought the ropes, but they were tied too tightly. His legs thrashed wildly, but the pole was between them, supporting his weight on the ropes around his ankles, and he could do nothing. When he went on struggling, one of the grave knaves came over and belted his jaw. David sagged.

They lifted me first and swung me through the air, a man at my sneakered feet, a man at my shoulders, and dropped me face down into the satin lining of the coffin. I have no idea where they got the coffin, it must have been stolen out of a graveyard, because there was the dank smell of decaying flesh adhering to its lining that was damn near stifling me to death. My face was pressed down into it.

I was still screaming as they let the lid slam on me.

Then I fainted, blinded by that gravelike blackness.

The darkness was all around me when I opened my eyes. I thought I was dead and in Limbo. If I was, the dead could smell, because that death stink was all around me. It was suffocating inside the coffin, and hot as if it were being slowly turned over a roasting oven. I had lifted my head to scream when the coffin was being closed, so I was still alive and breathing.

"Oh, God!" I whimpered.

I writhed, twisting. I found that I could turn my body just a little. The satin stuff inside the coffin was holding me, so I used my tied hands to tear some of it. The going was easier, then.

I squirmed until I was on my back.

Little good this did me. Still, my hands had been tied in

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front and I could raise my arms to the coffin lid. I pushed against it. No dice. It would not open. My shoulders slumped in despair. Half a ton of Mexican earth was holding it down.

It was getting harder to breathe.

Then I remembered that the leg muscles are a hell of a lot stronger than the arm muscles. I bent my gams and at the same time pushed upward with my hands. I strained until I thought my belly muscles were going to rip. Then—just as I was positive nothing was going to happen—the coffin lid moved the faintest fraction of an inch. Upward.

I breathed a sigh of relief into the air inside my prison.

At least, the coffin wasn't under the ground!

Not only that, but when the lid had gone up, some fresh air had come into the coffin with me. Frantically I clawed with my bound hands at the satin, ripping some of it loose. I balled it between my fingers and pushed it as close to the lid rim as I could.

I wriggled sideways until my knees and hands were near the crumpled lining. I drew a deep breath of the foul air and heaved. I grunted. My belly muscles hurt.

The coffin lid moved up.

My elbow pushed the balled satin into the opening.

This time when I let the lid drop down, it did not go all the way. The satin kept it from closing. I slithered around, got my face near the opening and breathed in fresh air. I lay there gulping deeply for about ten minutes, until I felt ready to try that lid again.

Hope gave me added strength. I got the lid up two inches, then slid an elbow into the opening. This let me move around inside the coffin until I was on my knees, my spine pressing into the bottom part of the lid.

Now when I heaved with my whole body, my back raised the lid. It swung upward seven, maybe eight inches. I swivelled about, still bending over, and slid my rump out. It was easy then, to lift the lid away from me and push it back.

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I sat there gulping at the dank air.

It was dark in here, but the air was reasonably cool. Sunlight came into the room through slits between ill-fitting boards. There were other coffins in with mine, seven in all. I tried to pick out the coffin that held David Andonian.

I got to my feet and moved between the coffins. I lifted one lid and then another, but they were all empty. I figured the living dead kept the coffins here to stuff their victims in them. When they were half dead, they were taken out and shoved full of drugs and turned into zombies themselves.

The next to last coffin was near the door. David Andonian is a big man, and I guess the grave knaves carrying him decided to utilize the first one handy. I wriggled my fingers under its lid and pushed up.

David was close to suffocating. He had been dumped into the coffin but he had been unconscious at the time. With his face half buried in the stifling satin lining, he'd never had a chance.

My hands gripped his shoulders, tried to turn him. He was a dead weight. I called his name. I shook him. I got halfway into the coffin and fitted my lips over his mouth. I began mouth to mouth resuscitation.

Five minutes later, he was still lying there, but his eyes were open and he was breathing. I began untying the ropes that held his wrists.

When he was free, he swung his legs out of the coffin so I could pull him up. Then he untied me and we moved quietly toward the door of the coffin shed. There might be a guard outside the door, and we wanted to take him by surprise.

There was no guard. There wasn't even a lock on the door. David pulled it inward and the hot Baja California sun flooded the interior of the shed. A quick glance told us the street was empty. A swirl of breeze stirred a dust devil, that soon died away.

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"Where is everybody?" I wondered.

"If I know my zombies, they're all asleep," David muttered. "Zombies like the dark, they move about in the night. They dread the day, like vampires."

"Are you sure we haven't been caught in the middle of a movie set?" I wondered out loud. "Zombies, vampires—cheest!"

"Science says vampires get that way from arsenic eating," he replied. Every once in a while I say the wrong thing to my case officer, and a lecture results. "In Austria, people used to eat arsenic against the threat of anemia. They ate only tiny amounts, but this was enough to give the arsenic eaters a healthy complexion and at least an appearance of good health."

"Where'd they get the arsenic?" I asked suspiciously.

"From the iron smelters. It was a by-product, it came in a yellow cake which could be used like butter. Women used it to give themselves red cheeks, which was highly regarded as a mark of great beauty. The only thing was, the arsenic preserved their corpses after death. Whenever an arsenic eater's grave was broken open, the body seemed to be alive.

"This was where the undead bit came in. Vampires are supposed to sleep during the day and stalk the world at night seeking victims from whom they can draw blood needed to give them life. How true this is—nobody knows. Anyhow, the Dracula legend was born that way."

We were pacing down the street while David talked. Suddenly his left arm shot out, like a bar. I bumped into it and halted.

"In there," he said.

His other hand gestured at a building which seemed bigger and stronger than the others. "What's in there?" I asked.

His stare froze me. "The munitions, woman. Didn't you listen to Estela? She said the terroristas use this place as a hiding spot for their guns and ammunition. No Indian or

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peasant in six hundred miles of this place would be caught here the way we were, just walking around. No, siree. Only the living dead live here."

We went up a rickety porch and then stepped into comparative coolness on the floorboards of what seemed, at one time, to have been a saloon. Cases of rifles stood along the walls. Barrels of gunpowder and boxes of bullets formed a small labyrinth from the dusty bar to the opposite wall, where the rifles were stacked.

"What a boom-boom we could make," David enthused.

I glowered at his grinning face. "And tell the *terroristas* we're onto them? Scratch that idea. We want the whole cast, not just some characters they've been feeding full of drugs."

"Yeah, I guess. Okay, then. You're so smart, you tell us what we do with all this stuff."

I pointed a dirty forefinger at his chest. "You're going to get to the nearest town—San Ignacio or Santa Rosalia—and contact the cops. I'll stay here until the *terroristas* come to pick up their bang-bangs."

David growled, "Let's just reverse that and—"

"I'm lousy at walking," I told him hurriedly.

He could hardly deny that, though he growled and grumbled about pampered females who do their work on their backs. I was standing beside one of the rifle crates, so I grabbed a loose slat and yanked upward.

A dozen brand new AK-47s lay inside. I gaped at them, gulping. "Help yourself to the latest Viet Nam enemy equipment, chief. These copies of Russian automatic assault rifles are damn good weapons. Perfect proof the Chinese are behind this operation."

David examined a gun, whistling, lifting it out and trying the bolt action, slamming it into his shoulder and squinting down the barrel. We L.U.S.T. agents are trained to handle firearms. I am a damn good shot myself, and I know David can outshoot me.

So I said, womanlike, "It won't get better with you

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playing with it. Grab a cartridge bandolier and start."

"I'm hungry," he protested.

I was starved, myself. The *terroristas* must keep some kind of food on hand to give their zombies the strength to capture stray visitors. All we had to do was find it. David fitted a sling to the rifle—discovering the slings all neatly folded in a smaller crate—and tossed a bandolier of bullets over his shoulder.

"The poor man's Pancho Villa," I giggled.

With such dignity as he could muster, David settled his rifle more firmly on his shoulder via its sling, then hitched at his bandolier. "Instead of throwing insults, you'd be of more use slinging hash," he muttered. "Let's go find the food."

We opened a door into what must have been a kitchen, at one time. There was a chopping block, an empty barrel with a length of pipe leading down from the wall into it, a broken table and some chairs, together with a brick hot-water pantry and a rusted iron stove. Dust lay on the room, tinted golden by the morning sun.

There was a space for shelves, built into the wall, but the shelves were as bare as that scene in *Hair*. We went outside and into the next building where we found a dozen men and women—the same ones who had attacked us—sleeping with their hands folded across their chests. There was the stink of drugs in the air.

People, but no food.

The end building was the supply depot. Cans of meat, of tomatoes, of powdered eggs, lined the two rooms from floors to ceilings. I grabbed a couple of cans of hash and added two cans of tomatoes. David found an opener and removed their tops while I tossed some broken *cardon* branches into a ring of stones that had been blackened by fire.

I cooked the hash and stewed tomatoes in a dirty skillet and a surprisingly clean pot. We perched on old, sun-baked benches on either side of the fire and ate. I have en-

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joyed food prepared by such master chefs as Alexander Dumain of France and Alfred Walterspiel of Munich, but this hash and stewed tomatoes was the best I ever tasted.

When we were done, I said, "There's got to be a place to wash these pans. David, those people need water."

My case officer grinned at me. "You find the water, honey. I'm on my way to fetch the cops."

He moved off around the building and across the rocky flats. I stared after him with mixed emotions. He seemed small with distance, one man against the fanatics operating with Red Chinese money. I felt like a teeny-bopper, myself.

I sighed and started hunting around for a pump of some kind. There had to be water in this hellhole. The *terroristas* needed it, so did the living dead sleeping away the daylight hours. The more-or-less clean cooking pot indicated it was here.

I left my footprints around the whole damn town without finding any pump. There just has to be water, I told myself. Naturally, my throat felt parched. The mere fact there was no water handy was enough to make me die with thirst.

I couldn't have cared less about the dirty pot and pan. I had another need for water, however, and I wasn't thinking about my dry gullet.

So I sat down on a cracked step of a building and put my chin on my fist. Where did they hide the water in these parts? If I'd had a dowsing rod of witch hazel or English willow, I might have made my try at finding it. The dried *cardon* branches made a good fire, but they left something to be desired in the art of water divining.

Then it came to me.

The empty barrel in the kitchen!

It had contained water, at one time. Lacking plumbing facilities, the people of this fun town in Baja California had been reduced to the methods used by early pioneers in

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New England. They'd had to furnish their own crude plumbing.

I went over to the munitions building and stepped into the kitchen. The owner of this one-time saloon (there used to be ranches in this corner of Mexico, years back) had washed his glasses in the sink which had been fastened to the water barrel. My fingertips ran over a broken section of the barrel where the drain sink had been attached.

Ah, yes. And this length of broken piping, extending from the wall had been used to conduct water from a springhouse into the barrel, from which the water drained off downhill below the kitchen floorboards. Running water all the time. It had probably been sweet and cool to the taste, too.

My mouth was practically dripping dust, it was so dry.

Outside, I noticed for the first time that the kitchen had been built into the lower slope of a hill; the wooden pipe leading out from the spring barrel was buried underground so the force of gravity would cause the water to flow from the spring down the pipe into the water barrel. A pipe from the water barrel had kept the drain sink full. A similar pipe from the sink had permitted the water to flow into a small trough beside it, thence along a funnel beneath the kitchen.

Now the wooden pipe to the spring barrel had rotted away, and water no longer flowed to the building. I ran up the hill as fast as my size fives would carry me. I got to the top and could have wept.

There was no springhouse.

Just dirt, dry and dusty and powdery, blowing up-slope and around my ankles. Dirt and sunlight and stones. No water. I sat down and damn near bawled.

I had been so positive!

Hey, now, Drum. Chin up! Think back. This town has been empty for close to half a century. A lot of things happen in fifty years, like wooden water tunnels rotting and—and . . .

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I got up and almost danced. The wind that kept blowing across the far slope of the hill had been blowing like that for hundreds of years. Maybe it had blown enough dirt to cover up the springhouse. I walked down the hill and turned around.

I could see it then, the little wooden door opening into the springhouse which was buried under the loam and dirt accumulation of the years. I scrambled up the hill, threw open the door and giggled like a schoolgirl at sight of the cool spring fed by an underground stream of water.

First, I drank my fill. Then I loaded all the pots I could find with that water and lugged it into the munitions room. I opened a hole in each gunpowder barrel and filled the barrel with as much water as it would hold. The gunpowder was ruined.

I turned my attention to the rifles. It was going to be difficult to spoil them, but there was a way. I carried one rifle with me as a guide and went out onto the rocky flats and began picking up pebbles. I chose only pebbles of a certain size.

I used a length of *cardon* to ram the pebble down into the barrel of the gun I held. It lodged midway down the barrel and would not shake out. I felt a little sorry for the *terrorista* who tried to fire this AK-47.

With my pots filled with pebbles and carrying the length of straight *cardon* branch, I trotted my hundred and ten pounds into the munitions room. Carefully I removed each rifle and dropped a stone into its barrel as far as it would go. Then I used my *cardon* ramrod to slam it firmly into place so it would not shake out.

It took me four hours to finish the job.

I replaced the rifles as they had been, put the ripped-out slats into place as best I could—I had loosened the nails and slats very carefully—and set the munitions room to rights.

By this time I was hungry again.

I started out the front door, noting that the sun was be-

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ginning its sink behind the Pacific Ocean to the west. I also noticed somebody was stirring up dust to the north.

Ducking back inside the room, I ran out the kitchen door and around into the shadow the next-door building made. I got bellydown on the ground and peeked around the corner of the building.

A single line of men and women was approaching the village of the dead. A tall, husky man in Fidel Castro cap, khaki shirt and trousers stuffed into parachute trooper boots was leading them. A stocky woman in the same kind of uniform followed at his heels. A blonde girl about my height was behind her. The rest of them were strung out in back of these three.

They carried rifles slung on their shoulders, they wore brown canvas belts from which pistols in brown leather holsters bobbed at their hips. On their left sides dangled scabbards holding long-bladed knives almost as big as machetes.

El terroristas!

The man in front caught my eyes when he smiled, parting his lips the way a donkey does when he brays, showing several gold teeth flashing in the sunlight. *El Oro*. The big cheese. The woman at heel, with black hair down to the middle of her back, had skin that was tinted olive. Big breasts bobbed loosely to her stride. I wondered if she had anything on under the khaki blouse.

The blonde especially attracted my attention. She looked a little like me, I thought. Her hair was about the same length as mine, her figure roughly similar. She kept looking at the dark woman and smiling cruelly.

"We will stay long enough for bullets," *El Oro* said.

Olive-skin pouted, "I want to sleep here."

The blonde laughed harshly. "Nita's afraid of the ground, she thinks a snake will crawl up her behind."

The dark girl whirled and went for the blonde, who slid her rifle off her shoulder and rammed the butt upward, aiming at the dark woman's belly. It never reached its tar-

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get. The man behind her grabbed her arm and swung her sideways while *El Oro* reached out and helped himself to a handful of the glossy black hair hanging down olive-skin's back. She went off her heels, so vicious was his yank, and slammed into him.

He drove her sideways with the back of a hand across her face. She bounced on the rocky ground, full on her behind.

"No trouble," *El Oro* growled. "Understand?"

The dark woman rubbed her right buttock. Her face flared with anger, but not at the man; her black eyes were fastened on the blonde woman. She snarled, "No trouble. Not now, anyhow."

"Not ever," snarled the *terrorista* boss.

The blonde smiled coldly, her armflesh still in the grip of the man who held her. "I won't make trouble, Oro."

"Damn right you won't," growled golden boy. "You bring up the tail end of the line when we get under way again. You stay by yourself at the night stop. I'm putting you into solitary, Raquel."

The blonde woman pouted, shrugging a shoulder. She seemed to think *El Oro* would not leave her in solitary for very long. She moved with swaying haunches and gently shaking buttocks under her cheek-fitting khaki pants toward a broken tie-rail, while I watched her strut, studying it.

I wanted to know as much about this Raquel babe as I could, because in a little while I was going to be Raquel, myself.

CHAPTER FOUR

I could not make my try at Raquel until tomorrow, when she would be a low man on the *terrorista* totem pole, bringing up at the tail end of the single-file line. If she lagged behind far enough, killing her would be as easy as devouring a blueberry tart at a pie-eating contest.

In the meantime, I had to stay out of sight. Not being in terrorist uniform, I would stand out like a nudist at a church social. So I made myself scarce.

I hid the Drum bod in one of the coffins. Naturally, I waited until El Oro had gone to examine the coffins, to learn if his zombies had captured any more unwilling volunteers for his ragtag army.

I gathered, had he found anybody in one of those biers, he would have shot him full of drugs and added him to his fearsome family. No sooner had he left the coffin shed than I was slithering my frame inside a casket. I fell asleep with its lid propped open so I could breathe. Oddly enough, I slept like a baby.

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My eyes popped wide a little after dawn.

I tiptoed around the village of the dead, making sure everybody was in his place. Raquel was snoring slightly, lying outstretched on the dusty porch of what had been a saloon. I would keep an eye on her.

The rest of the scare gang were just waking up. Some of them had new cartridge bandoliers hung about their shoulders, one or two had traded their old rifles for the Chinese-made AK-47 automatic attack guns. Raquel, thank God, was quite content with her shiny new Russian AK-50. I would have hated to rely on any of those guns I'd rammed pebbles into, in an emergency.

While I drooled, I watched the boys and girls eat their breakfast and then shoulder their rifles. They marched out with El Oro in the lead, Nita right at his heels. Sullenly, her behind resting on a porch rail, Raquel waited until the next to last marcher was half a mile away. Then she shouldered her AK-50 and began her own walk.

Me, I was her shadow. I slithered and crawled and ran across the barren soil, scratching a thigh and bruising my hip in the process of keeping up with her. Not that she walked fast, she was too mad to want to keep up with the group, but I was afraid she might turn around and eye her back trail.

Luck was with me. Two hours after leaving *el pueblo des muertes*, my pussycat prey sighed and sank her rear down on a flattish rock. She made a grimace with her lips, and reached for her canteen. Her face was turned away at this moment, so I figured it was a good time to launch my attack.

I ran across the barren ground as fast as my legs could carry me. I might have made it undetected had not a rock decided to make a stab at my toe. I plunged face down right in front of her.

"*Carambra!*" Raquel squealed. "Who're you?"

I answered her with my hands that latched onto her right ankle, tugged and turned. Raquel squawked, slid off

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the rock and bounced her buttocks on some stones just below her resting place.

"Sorry about this sweetie," I muttered—and slammed her in her soft belly with an elbow.

The air went out of her lungs. She gasped and choked, flopping in her helplessness. If you have ever had the breath driven from your lungs, you know that feeling. She could hardly move.

"I'll make it easy honey," I told her.

My hands went to her throat. She was another human being, I know; after my hands left her throat, I was sick all over the ground; but she was an enemy and I was engaged in a quiet little war to prevent her kind from getting a foothold south of our border. So I did what had to be done, then relaxed to let nausea soothe my nerves.

I buried her naked body and my clothes under a cairn of rocks. Then I slid into her plain cotton panties, khaki pants, blouse, fatigue cap and the armament she had carried. I examined the attack rifle, the machete in its scabbard, the two hand grenades hanging from the leather belt. Everything seemed to be in good working order.

I took up the march where Raquel had left off.

Far ahead of me, I could make out the thin line of terrorists moving slowly around an arroyo. The last man turned and waved at me. Listlessly, I waved back. Fortunately, Raquel had been teed off at her pals. I could lag behind all I wanted, and pretend to be as sullen as the dead girl really had been.

The one thing that troubled me was, how in hell was I going to hide my face from the others when it came time to join them? Sure, I looked a little like Raquel, but not that much like her. Up close, they would spot me as a stranger at first glance.

So I needed a disguise.

I figured I would not need it for very long. I was going to play *terrorista* only long enough to learn where the

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scare group was heading so I could prevent their going through with their task.

Maybe I could make do with the red bandanna Raquel had in her pocket. I tied it around the lower part of my face so I looked like a bandido. Anybody could yank it off, sure, but I was counting on the fact that Raquel had a mad on at her world, and would repulse any such attempt.

It was damn hot, under that Mexican sun.

My shirt was sopping wet by the noontime halt, my yellow hair hung down limp and lifeless on either side of my masked face. I felt like a mess and I'm damn sure I looked like one.

El Oro came toward me as I sank down to reach into my knapsack for such rations as I could find. I stared at him over the red bandanna, scowling.

"Why are you wearing the bandanna?" he asked.

My shoulders lifted in a shrug. He grinned and said, "You took a fall, *si*? You scratched your pretty cheek, *si*?"

"*Si*," I yelled angrily. "*Si*!"

His laughter boomed out. "Raquel, you think too much of your appearance. You should forget yourself and be a good member of the Party."

I did not answer him, not so much because my Spanish was too fluent, it was; we L.U.S.T. agents must learn foreign languages as part of our training; I just didn't want him getting suspicious about my voice. Raquel was so mad at everybody it would be part of her character to sit here sullenly, by my lonesome, without talking.

El Oro laughed and shook his head as he walked off.

The march did not resume right away. Everybody curled up for a *siesta*. I wriggled the Drum bod close to a sheltering barranca, a mini-bluff of tinted stone that afforded a little relief from that damn sun, and tried to get some shut-eye, too.

The thought touched my mind that while they were all asleep, I could wipe out this band of terrorists with a few blasts from my stubby AK-50. Maybe I could, but I didn't

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want just a few individuals, I wanted the whole damn crowd. And to get them, I had to take risks until I could learn their set-up.

So I dozed for about two, three hours, until El Oro yelled it was time to be up and about. We continued marching across this land of Baja California that looks so much like an outpost of Hell itself. It was slog, slog, slog along until your feet damn near dropped off. I sweated, I swore. The Russian attack rifle felt like a ton, hanging on its strap from my shoulder.

It was dusk when El Oro threw his right arm high into the air. Everybody ahead of me came to a halt, so I did, too. As a matter of strict reporting, I sank down on the ground and lay with my arms and legs stretched out, like I'd been spreadeagled. I ached in every neuron.

I could hear preparations for eating getting under way. I was a little surprised nobody yelled to me to come help until I remembered Raquel was getting the solitary confinement treatment. I grinned under my bandanna, grateful for small favors.

The smell of roasting meat gave me some strength. I sat up, clasping my knees and watched a couple of the men working a spit over a small campfire. To one side of them, El Oro was bringing out a number of bottles of what appeared to be water.

Well, in a sense it was. Fire water.

It was tequila, straight. I saw El Oro, his long uncut dirty yellow hair gleaming in the firelight, take a swig of the first bottle he opened. Then he lapped up a smidgeon of salt he had sprinkled on his palm, and grinned at Nita. From Nita, he turned at me.

I guess he thought I was burning up with jealousy. He was a smart cookie, that El Oro. He'd been playing Nita off against Raquel and getting what he wanted from both of them. I put my hand to my bandannaed nose and wriggled my fingers at him.

He chuckled and shook his head, highly amused.

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They brought me a platter filled with roast hare, some frijoles and a tin cup with tequila in it. I needed the salt for my sweat-drained body, so I licked the salt and took sips of the tequila before I tackled my food.

After eating, I felt more like a human being. So I crawled off toward a sun-baked boulder and propped my back against its huge bulk. It was night by this time, and the stars were like eyes looking down at me from far away. I stared up at them and tried to organize my thoughts.

My thinking was interrupted by a harsh cry.

"Olé!"

Curious, I turned my neck and froze. Nita was standing to one side of the campfire, sliding her unbuttoned blouse down her arms. Her big brown breasts were jiggling like Jello, capped by dancing purple nipples. The way the men and the other women were clapping, in rhythm to a harmonica somebody was playing, the message came through loud and clear. Nita was going to do a strip tease for the crowd.

She had an exciting body, her breasts were firm, her belly as she pushed her khaki chinos down, was a smooth mound of olive flesh dimpled by a navel. When her pants were halfway over her hips, she let go of them and raised her arms high over her head.

Her belly began to revolve lazily. She did not move any other part of her body, just the rounded belly. I wondered where she'd learned the *danse du ventre*. She was quite an expert at it. Her belly went 'round and 'round, her breasts shook ripely back and forth and forth, her hips got more naked as the chinos started reacting to the pull of gravity.

The men were licking their lips, their eyes big and hungry, seated in a circle about the campfire and the half-naked woman. The fireflames licked her flesh with bold red and black patterns, her heavy black hair made fans in the air as she tossed her head one way and then another. She was something out of the barbaric beginnings of the

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human race as she raised the temperature around that campfire to about a thousand degrees.

Then a second woman was joining her, her chinos left behind in the shadows, her lovely legs bare all the way up to her sacral dimples, which included her bouncing buttocks. Wearing only a brown khaki shirt, the second female—her name was Bernardina—laughed and flirted with the men over her left shoulder as she thrust out her behind and wagged it.

The Tequila was getting to the *terroristas*.

A lean man gave a shout and she got to her feet. Nita shrieked and reached for him with her bare arms. As she did so, Bernardina grabbed his shirt and began unbuttoning it, her arms wrapped about his chest. Nita and the man were kissing; I could see their tongues meeting between their opened lips as Bernardina rubbed her breasts against his back while she stripped the man.

A third woman, a *mestizo* of mixed Indian and Spanish blood, gave a shrill cry and leaped at the male, fastening her fingers in his trousers and yanking them down by sheer force. The man stood naked, aroused and primitive in the red firelight. Sweat beaded his face, his mouth was open with pleasure and his eyes narrowed as he studied the breasts shaking so ripely in front of him.

His hands caught Nita's breasts, squeezing them. The *mestizo* caught him in a hand, clasped his loins with a bare arm and devoted her pouting lips to his personal pleasure. Bernardina sank down on her haunches behind the volunteer, biting his buttocks with her tobacco-stained teeth.

Nita went on swinging her hips while all this was going on. Her chinos were almost at the valley between her plump buttocks, sliding downward very slowly. Too slowly for the man seated to the left of El Oro. This one shouted and leaped, his hands caught the trousers and dragged them down.

He began kissing Nita all over her olive-tinted behind. I saw there with my mouth open.

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I have taken part in orgies before, in the line of duty. This was something else again. It was an explosion of primitive needs and hungers, it was part and parcel of the mood of these *terroristas*—their *ambiente*, as the Mexicans name it—and it was almost a frightening thing.

Maybe there are too many layers of culture on our Western World, too much involvement with our heritage from the Puritans, from the hell-roarer preachers who traveled up and down the land in the Bible belt, and from the era of Victoria that gave birth to the first half of the Twentieth Century. Even the flower children don't carry their love-ins this far out, and they consider themselves very liberated people.

This was early man and early woman. Male and female with the wraps off, unashamed and uninhibited. They were animals. Well, man is an animal. He has larded over his jungle instincts with manners and customs. Here, the lard was scraped off, you could see the animalism peeping from those contorted faces and sexually excited bodies.

It was raw emotion, out there in the open.

My eyes were fascinated. They may have bulged a little, but they didn't miss a single beat as the man tore himself free from the *mestizo's* mouth and hurled his bulk at Nita. She welcomed him with legs spread wide, screeching as she shook to his impalement of her flesh, standing spraddle-legged, hips bucking fiercely. Slowly, gradually, her legs were bending, she was sinking toward the ground with his fingers deep in her soft buttocks.

The *mestizo* was on top of a second man who had paused only long enough to push down his trousers before dragging her above him. Bernardina was standing over a seated man, his long greasy black hair in her fingers as she forced him into her service.

"Raquel!" a voice cried.

El Oro was standing, looking my direction. He was the only one of the men not involved one way or another with the *terrorista* camp followers. He was aroused, his man-

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hood pressing into his tight trousers was plain to see. Around at his feet were the nude and almost-nude bodies of his fellow terrorists.

I thumbed my nose at him.

El Oro was not amused this time. He scowled, he stepped over the threshing, bumping bodies of Bernardina and the man named Genaro, walking toward the shadows where I sat. His face darkened with shadow, it hid his expression so I could not know whether he was angry or merely fretful at my indelicacy.

"You will dance for me," he said softly, out of that shadow.

I tossed a shoulder to indicate that Raquel had not yet forgiven him. I let my legs tense. I felt he would reach to rip away the bandanna, and I was going to fight him if he did.

Instead, he grabbed a handful of my hair.

His arms yanked upward. I screamed, not so much from the sudden pain as the fact that it was expected of me. I was Raquel, and Raquel was a hot-tempered, hot-blooded female. My scream was part pain, part red rage.

My hand darted out. I got a finger-grip on his manhood and twisted. It was El Oro's turn to scream. He let out a howl that came close to stopping the activities around the campfire. His body doubled up and he gasped out curses in a Mexican Patois with which I was unfamiliar. His hands dropped to mine and fastened around my wrists. He did not dare pull my hands away for fear I might do him irreparable harm.

"You lust for Nita!" I panted.

"*Dios mio!*—let go! Let go!"

"This—for her!" I screeched.

I gave a savage tug. El Oro went to his knees, tears in his eyes. He babbled that all the time he had been thinking of me and my pale, so-lovely body.

"Liar! Liar! Liar!" I shrieked, giving a yank at every

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word. I was practically dragging him on his knees across that rough ground.

There could have been something of the masochist in El Oro. Tears might be in his eyes, his body might be shaking in pain, but he was one excited man. My strong fingers and my sharp nails must have been excruciatingly agonizing, fastened to his delicacy as they were, but it was an agony that gave him ecstatic pleasure.

It came through to me that the *terroristas* were engaging in an escape mechanism from the cognitive processes through this orgy. They were up tight about going out to kill and burn; they knew the job they had to do, and they were subconsciously dreading it. Just as there are workshops today in *gestalt* therapy—in which the individual puts aside his thinking powers and resorts only to his emotions—so these scared boys and girls were indulging (whether they knew it or not) in the emotional encounters designed by some psychologists to dissolve suspicions, ease tensions and relieve neuroticism.

In other words, it was a carnal coffeebreak.

Recess! Time out from the serious business of being a terrorist. It was blood brother to the *saturnalia* of the old Romans, to the *aphrodisia* of the ancient Greeks, to the *sabbats* of the middle ages. When you were done with your orgy, you had been catharticised in body and in spirit.

Well, I could use a little of this mystique myself. I was hung up on this case, I was facing odds I could hardly hope to overcome without dumb luck and a favoring wind. I needed reassurance.

My ego needed building.

"I'm too good for you, you filthy pig!" I shouted down at El Oro's contorted face. Tears in his eyes, he nodded back.

"Yes—yes, you are," he panted.

He was talking off the top of his libido. His manhood was so much in control of his emotions, he was only saying what his sex needs told him to say. In his eyes, quite

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suddenly, I had become an authority figure. The fact that he was a terrorist at all showed El Oro was psychologically freaked out about authority figures. He wanted to tear down everything that smacked of control over him.

I was in control at the moment.

So he wanted to rape me, as a symbol of his revolt against the authority I presented. But his masochistic streak might prevent that. So it was up to me to make him rape me without his being aware of my part in our little morality play.

Oh, yes—I learn about human behavior in the schools for its operatives that the League for Underground Spies and Terrorists maintains. Not too long ago, I had come out of a refresher course.

Still gripping him, I unbuttoned my blouse, let the flaps fall apart so He could see my 38-inch, C-cup breasts. I shimmied my shoulders, made my mother symbols shake richly before his bulging eyes.

"See what you're missing?" I smiled cruelly.

He licked his lips, gulping.

I let go of him, stood tall before his kneeling figure. Lazily I shook my shoulders, making the khaki shirt slide down my arms. My breasts were thrusting proudly, they were hard and veined like marble, they trembled gently. The brown nipples were standing rigid, as excited as his manhood.

I dropped the shirt.

I was a topless trauma come to life before him. El Oro was sobbing softly, his hands were shaking as they lifted toward my mammaries. I brushed his outstretched finger with my hardened nipples.

"Don't touch me," I ordered. "Leave that to me."

I tortured him, letting my breastflesh sag into and then out of his cupped palms. His whole body was shaking uncontrollably and tears streamed down his checks. El Oro was one excited Latin lover, all right, But—he obeyed me.

My thumbs went to my belt, shoved pants and panties

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downward until my belly was naked above the belt that crossed my hips, just above my hairline. Suddenly I leaned forward, pushed my belly into his flushed face.

"Kiss it!" I demanded.

His arms went about my middle. His lips burned my bellyflesh. He rubbed his face against me, smelling my womanhood. His mouth was a flame branding me with its erotic needs.

His arms went lower, pushing down the belted chinos. They dropped to my upper thighs, exposing my blonde thatch to his adoring lips. He hugged my hips, he kissed my privacy as if he were the high priest of a flesh cult before his goddess. It was pretty exciting, he really tuned me in with his lips and tongue. I was jellying all over, trying desperately to remember that I was on a job and not just out here for kicks.

About ten minutes and half a dozen orgasmogenic oscillations later, I shoved him back and away so that he knelt there before me, staring up at me with bulging, disbelieving eyes as I closed my thighs and smiled down at him like a female about to deny her love the phallic privileges.

"Now me," he panted, working at his chinos.

It was half a question, the way he said it. I went on smiling and shaking my head, saying, "Uh-uh! Oh, no! No!"

"*Si, si!*" he snarled, shucking out of his pants.

I let my eyes widen, staring down. El Oro was a thing of masculine beauty, for he was the possessor of an organ that might be described by my more learned friends as macrophallic. In simple terms, he was a genital giant.

He tempted me, but I had my plan of action all laid out. No punishment and no erotic egocentric was about to make me change it. El Oro had to rape me. I was not going to give in to him, otherwise. In the back of my mind, I felt that a good rape would do wonders for his psyche.

They say you can learn about character in a card game.

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I have no doubt of it. But a smart female can learn more about a male in an intimate moment than in any number of bridge, poker, canasta, or gin rummy sessions. I was betting my life on the fact that El Oro subconsciously dreaded the task he had set himself, that he was essentially masochistic in nature, that if I could expose him to himself, I could throw a cog in his *terrorista* machinery.

Sound complicated? Let me put it this way: El Oro was a child at heart, childishly rebelling against authority. He was throwing a tempter tantrum by his looting, killing, and burning tactics. He *thought* he was a great big hero, he *thought* he was part of a new wave of civilization.

I was just trying to show him the truth.

"You aren't man enough for me," I grated.

He lunged for my bod, fingers spread wide. With my bandanna across my face, I'd added an element of mystery. I was not exactly the Raquel he had come to know, I might be somebody else. I could have been a mother image to his lust-distorted mind.

"*No me atorments mas!*" he screamed as I evaded him.

"Behave yourself," I shouted.

He was crouched over, sobbing with mingled rage and desire. I could have kicked him where it would have damn near killed him, but this would only make him a martyr to female brutality in his mind. My way was more subtle.

Three times he charged me, three times I skipped nimbly out of his way, giving him good long looks at my bouncing breasts and jiggling behindflesh. He was almost crazy when I finally caught his outstretched wrist and threw him to the ground. He fell flat on his back, his head thumped the rocky ground.

I straddled his nudity, feet planted on either side of his big hairy chest. He was staring up between my thighs and licking his lips.

"You're mine, sweetheart," I whispered.

"*Si, si*—all yours, *querida!* I swear it!"

"Nita has no call on your services!"

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His head went back and forth. He was in physical torment. He would say anything to get what he was staring at with those big black eyes. He muttered, "Not with Nita, not with Nita."

"Just with me! Just with Raquel," I snarled.

"*Si*—I vow it! I swear by the good God!"

My scheme might not work, I was just hoping it would. If I could get the upper hand on El Oro, I might be able to cause a little confusion in his terrorist band. It isn't funny. People are slaves to their sense impression. I was trying to get the motion through to the inner-man of El Oro that I was his master. He belonged to me, he must obey me, he must respond when I tugged the response ring in his nose.

My right hand went down and around him. His moan told me how good my fingertips felt to his phallus. I let my loins drop lower, I engulfed him. But I just held him there as I said, "Never forget it. I'm your boss!"

He nodded and his face smoothed out its tortured lines as I let my hips go to work on him in that action the French call *tortiller des fesses*. I let my breasts shake wildly and made my buttocks dance the fandango as I operated on my victim like a starved go-go dancer.

His mouth opened and he wailed. His hips thrust up from the ground as his lean, muscular body shook to the thrills that contorted it. He would never forget this ranti-pole ride, I swore between gritted teeth. I must master him completely, I must make him understand that only with Raquel could he enter into the ecstatic pleasure of *nayf*.

He got the message, I do believe.

To make sure, I bent above his face and while he feasted his eyes on my heaving breasts, I panted, "The name is Raquel, honey. Your woman. You can't get another woman in this whole wide world to give you a ride like this. You understand? Raquel is your woman. You must obey her, and she'll reward you.

"Obey and get rewarded. Ahhh! You like it, I can see.

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But it's only Raquel who can send you into this phallatic paradise. Raquel! Raquel! Raquel!"

Sure, it was heterocoital hypnotism.

I just hoped to God it would work.

Because, long before I was done with him, somebody tangled a hand in my flowing blonde hair which was whipping up and down sideways as I did by bugaloo beat on El Oro. I was yanked backward, my bare legs kicking helplessly at the sultry Mexican night.

My behind took the beating when I did a two-check landing. But even as the pebbles were putting their prints into my flesh, I was turning and getting a quick eyeball version of a damn mad Nita standing above me with her fingers tangled in my hairdo and slobbering with hate and the will to wallop me.

My forearms came up between hers even as I gathered my gams beneath me and launched my bod upward. I let my forearms move out and sideways. They caught Nita by surprise, she expected me to be a sobbing Sadie, because her mouth opened and her eyes got big. Her hands let go of my hair as my forearms hit her wrists.

My head lowered. I butted her in the belly.

The breath went out of her in a wailing thwoop. She was a fleshy girl, there was a lot more meat on her than there should be. Maybe she had never heard of Metrecal or maybe the terrorist troubadors liked their women on the fat side. Anyhow, she was overweight and under-breathed.

I slammed the edge of my hand against her neck. She wobbled on her feet, gasping. She had been aching for this confrontation with Raquel for a long time, and here it was before her, exploding in her surprised face.

I grabbed her by her long black hair and brought her face down into my lifting knee. There was a sodden thwaaap. Nita let out an agonized wail.

"*Bastante!* That's enough! Stop! Stop!" yelled El Oro, as Nita clawed for my face.

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I certainly did not want Nita to yank off my bandanna and reveal me for the substitute I was. Nita might hate Raquel, but El Oro did not hate her. And El Oro would certainly take a dim view of any woman taking her place. I had conditioned him (I hoped) to obey Raquel. I had not mentioned Eve Drum at all.

So I wanted to get this female fracas over with as soon as possible. Behind us, El Oro was gamely struggling to his feet; he had been interrupted at a very inopportune time; he was torn between maintaining discipline in his little band and throwing himself on me.

I paid him no never mind.

My hand chopped upward under the choking Nita. Its edge landed on her throat, not hard enough to crush her Adam's apple, but certainly powerfully enough to make it tough to swallow for the next few days. Nita had lost all desire to sock it to me, she was only concerned about getting out of this digit debate alive.

Nita went to her knees. I got on her back as if I were going to play piggyback ride. My hands dropped to her thick black hair that was coarse and much like a horse's mane. I got a finger grip and began bouncing her head up and down on the gravelly ground.

"You like to fight?" I asked. "Here's a fight!"

Bump bumpa bump bump!

"You up tight about me, honey? Here's knocking it out of you!"

More bump bumpa bump bump . . .

She was crying real tears by this time. I think she was out of her skull with pain. Her body flopped around as she tried to buck me off, but I wasn't having any. She was a terrorist who liked to hurt people, so I was just giving her back some of her own.

El Oro was trying to grab me and drag me off her. I figured this was just as good a time as any to test my Raquel-the-Boss technique on him.

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"Stay back," I howled. "She wanted this and she's going to get it. I'm telling you—back off!"

"You'll kill her," he protested, but he drew away.

"No I won't," I panted, going bump bumpa bump some more. "I'm just trying to knock some sense into her stupid head. If she gets any more ideas about wanting to fight me, she'll think ten times before she tries."

"Just don't kill her," El Oro pleaded.

I climbed off when Nita went limp. I was happy on two counts. Nita hadn't been able to yank my bandanna down, and El Oro had obeyed me rather than knocking me off Nita when I was basketball-dribbling her head along the ground.

I tucked his arm under mine.

"Come along, honey," I wheedled.

It was time for his reward.

CHAPTER FIVE

Next day, I woke up with the feeling that eyes were staring at me, an uncomfortable awareness that something is not quite right, so I started eyeballing the camp myself. It was not hard to find the cause of my uneasiness.

There were three of them, like the witches in MacBeth. Nita and two cronies, hunkered down by the campfire where they were making coffee, were giving me the evil eye in triplicate. I rolled over and checked my bandanna. It was still in place, or almost.

They couldn't have seen I wasn't Raquel. If they had, they'd have been raising such a commotion El Oro would have come to learn what the trouble was; and I could make him out down by the little stream, washing his face. Or maybe he had a hangover and was using the cold mountain water to soothe his tensions.

Between me and the tequila he had swallowed last night, I could understand his lack of *joie de vivre*. He would be in a mean mood. His body must be completely drained of

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energy and the pounding beat of his Excedrin headache must be some kind of awful.

I made certain my face was covered, then thought about my girl-girl body. I had been lying stretched out, my clothes rumpled here and there under me where they'd been when El Oro and I had finally drifted off to sleep.

I pulled my shirt out from under my behind and slid my arms into it. The terror toreadors—the male members, I mean—cocked their eyeballs at my strip tease in reverse. They had never seen the undressed Raquel, I gathered from the way they stared at my mammaries and unclad hips. Nita and her two *malocchio* mates were giving me the points of their own dangerous looks; I was some center of attraction.

So I figured, if they were that interested, I would put on a little show for them. I got to my bare feet with the shirt half on and half off, and started looking around for my socks and boots. I took my time, I bent over half a dozen times with my rear end facing my audience and with my legs unreasonably far apart.

I heard the men sighing and the women snarling. None of them had ever seen a real blonde before, unless Raquel herself had done some kind of reverse ecdysiast act for them.

El Oro came up the slope of the little mountain stream, saying, "*Que tienes?* Get back to work, you idiots! Raquel—*eres* models?"

I was not a model. So I shrugged and began to button up the shirt, standing languidly, naked below the shirt-hem. I said out loud, "I have to get dressed. Tell them to look the other way. I'm not on exhibition!"

El Oro growled orders to his men. He went over to Nita and the other two women and kicked them into obedience with his paratrooper boots. I figured obedience was becoming a chancey thing with the *terroristas*.

I got dressed with only El Oro looking at me.

Not being a fool, I knew that Nita was alive with

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screaming hate, and that she had enlisted the aid of her two buddies to help her act it out. If she got the opportunity, Nita would jump me and scratch ugliness all over my pretty face. I shuddered at that; I am willing to make sacrifices for my Uncle Sam, but I draw the line at marring the smoothness of my female features.

I was tucking my shirttails into my chinos when El Oro began his talk. He wandered up and down having his say, waving an arm and then to emphasize a point. The others went on with their tasks as if he did not exist. After all, they didn't have to look at him to hear his voice.

"We will attack the village of Secorro on the third morning from now. Secorro is filled with men and women who do not want to change their ways, who send us no recruits for our terrorist program.

"Certain other villages are holding back also, but they are not as vehement in their refusals as Secorro. The village chief is named Calaros. He is an old man, but he's damn clever. He keeps a tight hand on his young warriors, he tells them that riding off to fight for us does not put beans in their bellies. He keeps them working in the fields.

"We must make a show of Secorro.

"We will kill a few, the chief we will torture to death to be an example for others who resist us. When the other village chiefs have heard how Calaros died—hung upside down over a small fire in the old Apache manner, so his brains cook slowly inside his skull—they will not be eager to oppose us any more.

"No! They will be anxious then to send us their strongest, bravest young men.

"The Mouse will join us, with his band of recruits. *El raton* will strike Secorro from the other side. We cannot lose. We will not even get so much as a wound, for we will attack while the men are still asleep.

"Now—any questions?"

There were no questions.

We ate breakfast in a total silence. Nita gave me sullen

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glances from time to time and I could see her whispering to her crone-like cronies when El Oro was out of whisper range. Careful, Eve darling, I warned myself. Don't let those three bandido biddies catch you with your guard down.

El Oro wanted me to walk beside him on our march, but Nita and her gruesome twosome wanted none of that. They made such a screeching that El Oro, rather than risk his leadership, growled that I was still in solitary. I would be end man on his panic parade for one more day.

That must have been all Nita wanted. She quieted when he said that, and gave me a triumphant look. I shrugged and waited until the others were well on their way before I slung my attack rifle over a shoulder and followed.

We were moving southward into the region around San Ignacio, climbing steadily into the lower reaches of the Sierra de Lagiganta mountains. It was a desolate region of baked earth and tall cirio trees. The elephant trees with their leathery boles swollen with stored water and the greyish rocks scattered on the land like the broken teeth of giants, added to its grotesquerie.

The sun was hot, my body was reeking sweat as I trudged along in their footsteps. From my tail-end position, I could make out the dozen members of the little party, I counted and recounted them every ten minutes to make sure Nita and her goon-girls were up ahead of me.

The hills were getting steeper, now. Stretches of time slid by when I saw nothing at all of my companions. The boulders lying across the hills were bigger, rougher. The cirio trees were taller, as if they wanted to hide the barren world around them from chance onlookers. I admit I was falling further and further behind; the terrorists were used to this sort of marching, I was not.

I tried running to keep up, but my breath supply was short; I was panting just as much as I was sweating. And I was getting scared. These hills were damn lonely, I could lose myself here, without a glimpse of the others to act as a

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companionly compass. I didn't look forward to being lost in these hills for any length of time.

There was a huge chunk of rock up ahead that had been split apart to form a narrow pathway by some geological upheaval in past ages. I figured that was where the boys and girls had gone, so I angled my footsteps toward it.

I was halfway through when somebody lowered the boom.

Actually, it was one of the goon-girls leaping from a perch above my head. She came down on me like a ton of bricks. Her dirty paw clamped across my mouth and we rammed the rocky ground together, with her riding my shoulders.

I was only half conscious when I saw Nita scrambling over the talus rocks toward me, a big grin splitting her face. I saw her booted foot coming toward my face. I had no chance to duck because the goon girl had my long yellow hair in her fist, holding it back so Nita had herself a great target.

The boot hit me like a Gogolak toe.

I woke up to find myself spreadeagled stark naked on hot sand and hotter rock. Raw green-hide thongs held my wrists wide apart, ditto my ankles. I was stretched out on my spine, barely able to bump my midsection off the sand.

Another thong had been tied across my face, driving the bandanna that covered it deep into my mouth. The bandanna served to help suffocate me, because, although it held my jaws open, breathing air in through the bandanna itself was mighty difficult. I lay there gasping, half-blinded by my own sweat.

Nita was standing over me, a length of yucca stalk in her hand. Her black eyes were hard. "The blonde bitch is awake at last. How do you like this for your place in the *terrorista* sun, puta?"

I shook my head. I tried to tell her I was not the Raquel she hated, but my words sounded like "Mmm nogga rak-

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kaell." I didn't blame Nita for thinking I was telling her to go to hell.

The yucca switch came down across my bare belly. My pinned-down body lurched as savagely as it could. My wail of pain sounded like a weak cat mewling.

Nita grinned and hunkered down. Quite casually she began beating the thin stick across my belly and my upper thighs. She accompanied her bongo-drum beat with words. "Those thongs are made of raw hide, Raquel, you bitch. They shrink when the hot sun hits them. They will pull your arms from their sockets, your legs from your hips in a little while—and you won't be able to do a damn thing about it."

I was flopping about, crying real tears.

The thin yucca stalk was raising big welts on my girl-girl flesh. The thongs were pulling at my arms and legs. Agony was a fire in my entire body.

One of the goon girls stirred, saying, "El Oro will back-track for us when he finds we're gone, Nita, Hurry it up."

"We are safe enough. I told him we would rest. By the time we have finished with her, he'll only begin to get suspicious!"

She began laying the stick across my big breasts. This time you could hear me screaming all the way to Mexicali. The pain was awful. My body thumped the ground as I tried to wrestle the thongs out of the path of that crudely made whip.

Nita grinned, "It doesn't feel so good, hey? Too bad you can't go on living, bitch. You would be ugly, then. No man would look at your *tetas*. But Nita can't have everything."

My head was not tied down, so while I was screeching through the bandanna, I could see the thin welts the stick raised from my soft breastflesh. Normally my C-cup shapes are a pallid white with blue veins running through their milkiness. Now all I could see were thin red lines.

My head went back and forth. I tried to pray, to beg for mercy, I sought to tell them they'd made a mistake. My

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voice was drowned inside the bandanna that served to hide my identity. That bandanna had been my friend at first, now it had turned against me.

I figured if Nita discovered I was a spy, she would take me to El Oro—alive. El Oro might shoot me, but that would be a swift death, compared to this awful torture. The whip rose and fell, my body flopped and bumped and my throat was raw with muffled screams.

Nita quit when her arm was tired. She stared over my whipped, bleeding body and asked, "The ocotillo? Do you have it?"

One of the goon girls handed her a slim length of ocotillo branch. The thing was covered with thorns. My eyes were so wet with tears of pain, I could hardly make it out. Was she going to lash me with that? I could not scream any more, all I could do was moan.

Nita laughed and held the ocotillo stick before my wet eyes.

"You see? The thorns are long and sharp."

She rose up to her feet, she turned and crouched between my spread thighs. Then she jammed that thorn-covered thing up into my privacy.

My scream was an eruption of agony in the air.

My body thumped the ground, I tried to draw back from that agonizing invader. The thongs were too tight, they were sinking rapidly in that hot sunlight. I lay there suffering, and I wanted to die.

I fainted after a few moments of the most intense pain my body has ever endured. When I came to, one of the goon girls was rubbing what seemed to be oil into my private parts, and all over my upper thighs and belly.

At first I thought she was giving me aid and sustenance.

But it was not oil she was smearing on me. It was honey. My eyes widened in horror. I made a mewling sound. The goon girl smiled.

"Honey!—*si!* It makes the ants come. They crawl all over you, they bite, they eat."

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Soldier ants live in South America, not in Mexico. But Mexico has its own brand of killer ants, the ponerine ants which are usually found in Panama but are occasionally discovered as far north as Baja California. Nita and her goon girls had discovered a colony and had decided to put it to a deadly use. A ponerine ant is an inch long and possessed of huge pincers. It loves to dine on flesh.

The goon girl jerked her head. Nita was engaged in dropping tiny globules of honey all the way from me to the ants' nest. They would follow that trail to me. They would eat that honey and with it, me. The flesh they loved to touch with their ripping, tearing mandibles.

I could not move to avoid them. The green hide thongs had tightened to the point of pain, by this time. Each thong felt as if it were tearing an arm or a leg from its socket. I could breathe and stare up at the brilliant sun if I cared to, but that was all I could do. And breathing through that damn bandanna was not as easy as it might seem.

I was in utter misery.

Nita came to gloat over me. I guess my misery showed in my eyes because she nodded, thoroughly satisfied. "It will take you a long time to die, *puta*. The ants will eat your flesh while you are still living --and suffering from the pain of dislocated bones, pulled steadily apart."

She shivered. "It is not a nice death. While you are dying, reflect on the fact that El Oro will enjoy my body—not yours. It will add to your last few miserable hours of life."

Had I been Raquel, how right she would have been! But I couldn't care less whether she enjoyed El Oro or not, I was only concerned about getting out of this dear little death trap. I knew it was fruitless to hope, but I couldn't just quit on myself.

I lay and watched them walk away along the narrow passageway through the gigantic, split-open boulder. I moaned steadily, making a kind of hum in my ears. A thousand times I thought I felt the ponerine ants climbing

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up my inner thighs, nibbling away at the honey—and me. My arms and legs were numb, useless.

The sun was hot. It grew hotter toward the middle of the Mexican day. I lay there naked and baked. I had no more sweat in me. My eyes were closed because I didn't want to go blind, staring at that sun, and all I could feel was the pain of my legs and arms.

I was going to go mad when the ants started in. I felt this, deep inside me. That was one thing I could never endure. Maybe madness would be a blessing. I sure hoped so.

Then from the corners of my eyes, I noticed movement.

A thin black line was crawling down the slope, over sand and over rocks, aimed in my direction. The poncine ants!

No! Oh, God—no! Don't let me die this way, eaten alive by inch-long monsters!

My prayer was mental. I had no strength to talk. Weakly, I sought to fight the rawhide thongs, and could not. I just lay there, waiting. The pains in my armpits where my humerus bones fit into their sockets, and at my hips where my femurs rotated in my pelvis, were like red-hot brands pressing my flesh.

Tears welled up in my eyes.

The ants were closer. Very close. One big ant actually touched my leg, probing it, then began mounting upward. I writhed weakly. I wept. I was stretched just as far as I could go without something giving.

And then—something gave.

spaaaakk

One of my arms had been torn from its tendons! I felt the tension go out of it. At the same time I felt an ant bite into me with its pincers. It was starting to eat me.

Instinctively I tried to brush it away. Without thought, with no mental process that I was aware of, I stretched my right hand down toward my thigh.

There it was, in front of me. My right hand. It still had

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the rawhide thong around it, and there was a thick wooden stake on the other end of the thong. I stared at my hand and at the stake for a few seconds before my pain-numbed mind realized that the rawhide thong that held my left wrist had stretched so tightly—

It had pulled the stake out of the ground.

I started bawling, even as I slapped at the ant using me for a midday snack. I killed it with one blow, then I started yanking at the thong that held my left wrist. It wasn't easy, the stake was driven in pretty deeply. But it came loose before the main body of ants reached me. Now I could sit up.

As I did so, the thorny branch still inside me, scratched.

I let out a yip. Gently, I tried to get that length of ocotillo out of my privacy. As I tugged, the thorns slashed my most tender flesh. I came near fainting.

I would have to let the thorns wait. I freed my left ankle, then my right. Naked on hands and knees—it made easier going with the ocotillo in me—I crawled away from the ponerine ants.

Three times I collapsed before I got through the narrow path between the broken boulder. I yanked off the bandanna and the thong that held it stuffed in my mouth, so I could breathe again.

From time to time I stopped to tug at that thorny branch, but the agony of its removal was so intense, I could not continue. I just crawled along and whimpered.

Sometime before dusk, I heard the gurgle of running water. I had no idea where I might be. I was out of my skull, I think. I was an agonized automation, crawling, crawling. My palms and my knees were bleeding.

The watery sound revived me. I stared around and located a tiny stream that trickled its contents into a sink, a natural depression in the stone about three feet deep in spots.

I crawled to that water, I shoved my face in it and drank deep. The water was clear and cold, the sink was fed to

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overflowing by an underground stream. After I had drunk my fill, I slithered my naked body down into it, to let the coldness and the wetness soothe my tormented flesh.

It was underwater that I finally got the thorn branch out. It hurt like the seven hells of Norse mythology, but I did it. I washed off the honey and the sweat with shaking hands.

This was heaven, relaxed in this cold water held in what appeared to be a big stone tub. I lolled, letting my strength come back. When I finally pulled myself out of the sink, I felt a whole lot better.

So I thought. But no sooner was I out of the water than I damn near fell apart. I lay back on the rock and fainted dead away.

My eyes opened to the sound of a horse whinnying. Overhead the first stars were in the night sky and purple dusk lay like a cape across the land. I sat up, forgetting I was buck naked.

Three vaqueros in serapes, brown leather chaps, loose cotton shirts and floppy Mexican sombreros sat on their saddles, staring at me. Those saddles bore the big, Mexican horn and their stirrups were ornamented by dangling leather tapaderos. They were lean, young men, and their eyes were alive with interest as they studied my milky hips and jutting breasts.

"Hola, boys," I said weakly.

A fourth man came into view, walking a beautiful bay horse. At sight of me he swept off his sombrero—it had a silver chain about it, as a hatband—and gave me a big smile.

"*Buenos noches*, senorita," he said. "It appears that you have had a little trouble. Manuel, your serape to cover the young lady."

I wrapped the serape about me, and smiled weakly. "Trouble is a mild word for it, senor," I murmured. "I was beaten and robbed by a band of roving maniacs."

"Ah," the man sighed. "You have made the acquaint-

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ance of our *terroristas*." He shook his head sadly. "These are bad times for a lone girl to go wandering about in Baja California."

He hesitated, then said, "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Don Miguel Dias del Castillo Merida. I am a rancher in these parts. I would be honored by your visit." His eyes touched my tortured body, studying the still-red welts and the wounds I had washed. "I feel I must insist upon it, *senorita*. If I were to leave you here, you would die."

I smiled up at him. "Your offer is accepted with much thanks, Don Miguel. I can't think of anything I'd like more to do than take a warm bath and slide in between some clean sheets."

"*Bueno!* Whom have I the honor of rescuing?"

"Eve Drum, an American. I was motoring down the transpeninsular highway—such as it is—when my motor overheated. I was on my way to find water, when those awful people caught me. They—they even tortured me. It was dreadful."

He freed his left foot from the stirrup, reached down to give me a hand. I was swung up, was caught by powerful arms and held between the big pommel and Don Miguel, so that I nestled against his chest.

"Are you comfortable, *senorita*?"

"Oh, very," I replied with a smile.

It was good to be back in civilized arms again.

I was glad that I did not have to walk to the hacienda Merida. It was three hours away by hoofbeat. I dozed a little, so close to Don Miguel, and I honestly didn't much care if the serape opened up from time to time to give him a good look at my nakedness by moonlight.

I came out of my doze before a large house that looked a little like a pre-Civil War southern mansion. White pillars framed a brick building studded with white window frames and matching shutters. A tile roof, faded white from the sunlight that had baked it for close to a hundred

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years, covered both the main house and the two small wings on either side.

Don Miguel helped me down from the saddle, nodding his head at the house and saying, "It belonged to my father and to his father and his father before him. It was built in the early part of the last century. My great-great grandfather was a visionary and an idealist. He had some idea of turning Baja California into a garden."

"But he lacked the water," I added, gathering the serape about me and moving with my host toward the pillared portico that stretched across the face of the main house.

"Exactly. He had hoped to find a subterranean river and use its water to irrigate his fields. Unfortunately, all he uncovered were a few underground streams, not nearly sufficient to provide the grass on which his beef stock could exist. My grandfather turned to raising goats. Goats can live where cattle may not. He made a success of goat raising."

I was ushered into a cool foyer, carpeted by rugs woven from goat's hair. A small table, two chairs of Spanish workmanship and a wagonwheel chandelier, gave the small chamber a distinct personality. Don Miguel smiled and nodded his head at my exclamations of admiration.

"The little touches—they mean so much to a woman—*no es verdad?* I must admit, I admire them myself. I will show you the entire house, once you have slept. Dolores!"

A small Indian woman of indeterminate age advanced to the foyer. She studied me with unemotional eyes.

"Conduct Senorita Drum to the blue room, Dolores. She will be our guest for as long as I can induce her to stay."

Dolores nodded, turned on an almost bare heel—under her pleated *chinquete*, or peasant skirt, she was wearing only leather sandals—and walked ahead of me into a large hall where an ornate staircase led to the second floor. The walls were done in polished mahogany below a chair rail, the upper part was painted stucco where brocaded drap-

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eries were hung. Against the chair rail were set the backs of half a dozen straight-backed chairs and two console tables.

I marched upstairs, where Dolores handed me a thin nylon nightgown—evidence of Don Miguel's lady wife?—which I promptly donned while the Indian woman was turning down the coverlets of a four poster bed. Blue and white wallpaper, the matching design in the blue chintz valance and the hooked rugs gave me the feeling that I was going to sleep inside a Delft vase.

I was too tired to care. I got my poor, tormented body between clean, cool sheets and fell asleep just as my head dented the feather pillow. I dreamed that Don Miguel was watching me as I slept and that just before I woke up, David Andjeranian came in to sit with him, looking at me.

When I did wake up, a man was with Don Miguel, but it was not my David. It was a doctor. He was tall and gaunt, his face sported a greying spade beard below sorrowful eyes sunken deep in his narrow head. His hands were long and extremely pale. He had drawn the bedclothes down and my nightgown up so he might better examine me.

"You could have asked," I pouted, lying there stark naked except for the nylon nightie tangled about my shoulders.

His smile was sad. "I am a busy man, *senorita*. I have not time for the usual amenities. *Por favor*, try to understand."

"Sure, whatever you say."

He clucked and tsked over my bruises and my wounds for almost an hour. His face paled even more when I told him about the thorny ocotillo branch that had been stuck up inside me.

"They are devils, those terrorists," he murmured.

I watched Don Miguel as I lay there naked on the sheets before the doctor. His eyes were bulging, his nostrils quivered. His elegant riding breeches, tight about his loins, showed he was quite a man. I was still too ill from shock,

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exposure and my wounds to think about sex. Don Miguel must have realized this, because he turned away after a moment and stared out the bedroom window.

"You need rest and care," the doctor said.

Don Miguel smiled, "I have to put my hacienda at her service, doctor Morales. Her slightest whim shall be as a command to my servants and myself."

The medico nodded. "Good. Good. I shall write out a few prescriptions, salves for her body and liquids to build her up, to make her grow healthy as soon as possible."

He pulled the covers up. "Now sleep, senorita," he ordered.

So I slept.

I went on sleeping, day and night, for about three days. I was finally waked by the Indian woman who rubbed salves into my skin, fed me with her hand, and made sure I took my medicine. I felt pampered and protected.

Outside of wondering what had happened to David Anderjanian and thinking about the poor Indians at Secorro that the terrorists were going to attack, I had no worries on my mind. I was *hors de combat*, out of the action for the time being, so I devoted all my energies to getting better.

I was aided by Don Miguel who came up to my room to talk and read to me every afternoon and evening. He promised to take me riding as soon as I could find the strength to sit a saddle. He vowed he would have friends in for a party in my honor.

It was during this time that I became fascinated by the conduct of the Indian woman who was my nurse. She was younger than I had thought at the time I first met her, in the baggy peasant blouse and skirt she adopted, and with her ebony hair pulled back on either side of her head. This hairstyle, with her black hair tied in a bun at the nape of her neck, would make anybody look older. Dolores was in her twenties, and with her hair let down her back and wearing a thin nightgown, as I had seen her from time to time, she was quite a dish.

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But she had become moody, of late. As a matter of strict reporting, she had started to pout and grow sullen three days after I'd been put to bed in the guest room.

One day I asked her what her hang-up was. "You seem to think I've done you wrong, somehow," I told her from the warmth of an easychair beside a bedroom window. Doctor Morales had permitted me to walk about a little, by this time.

Her black eyes snapped anger at me, but her full red mouth only tightened. She was making my bed at the moment, she glanced at me over a shoulder and let her hands tell me the way she felt by the way she fluffed up my pillows.

"Oh, come on," I cajoled. "We can make girl talk, can't we? You act as if I'd stolen your boy friend away from you."

She whirled, stung. "It is just what you did," she accused.

For one mad moment, I thought she meant I'd taken Don Miguel away from her, but she put me on the right track by saying, "The night you came here, Don Miguel sent my Bernal galloping off on a horse. Bernal has not come back. I have missed him in bed."

I asked weakly, "But why blame me? I didn't send Bernal away."

"If you had not come here, Bernal would still come to see me of nights," she informed me, with perfect logic. Planting her fists on her hips, she said, "I am a woman who needs a man every other night. When I do not get this loving, I am very mad at the world."

"All I can do is say I'm sorry."

She sniffed, and went on finishing the bed in a cold silence. The thing that puzzled me was the fact that Don Miguel had seen fit to send Bernal galloping off, at all. I stared blindly out the window, lost in thought.

Was Don Miguel checking up on my story? If he was, then Bernal would not find any automobile along the

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transpeninsular highway, where I had said I'd left it when its motor conked out from an overheated radiator. In that case, Don Miguel might consider me a liar and become suspicious.

It would not take four days for Bernal to ride there and back, however. No, something else was in the wind. But what? I told myself I'd better act as if I were walking on eggs, where my host was concerned.

Maybe Don Miguel thought me a *terrorista*. He might even make inquiries and learn that it was Nita and her goon girls who had tortured me. As Raquel the terrorist I might not be exactly welcome at the Merida hacienda.

I tried to be philosophical about all this.

I would play it by ear, when Don Miguel announced his suspicions of me. Until then, I would continue in my role of the lost, tortured Americano. It was a character part I could play very well indeed.

CHAPTER SIX

That evening I was permitted to go downstairs for the first time, in order to have dinner with Don Miguel. The don himself came to my bedroom with a selection of evening gowns over the arms of two Indian girls, to let me select what I would wear.

I chose a black satin evening gown. It was lowcut, it displayed my bare shoulders and the inner slopes of my milky breasts, but it showed off my figure to perfection. Under it I wore nylon stockings and a fancy black lace garterbelt.

I looked like slim seduction in it. Don Miguel thought so too, because as I came down the staircase, he turned from his small living room bar, a frosted cocktail shaker in a hand and his eyes got the glazed look I have seen again and again in David Anderjanian's eyes when he suffers from phallus fever.

"*Dios mio!* You're breathtaking," he murmured.

In the continental style, he bent to kiss my hand. The

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action made me feel like a princess. I dimpled a smile at him, letting my baby blues get wide and soulful, my curving red mouth thanking him for his courtesy.

He poured me a martini.

There was something more than just plain gin and dry vermouth in my cocktail glass. I have sipped enough cocktails to know the exact taste of a martini. I wondered which of several aphrodisiacs the don had slipped into the shaker. I gathered that he intended to play doctor to me this night and find out for myself whether my orgasm organ was in good working condition.

Don Miguel was a handsome man. I was tuned in on his good looks and his courteous ways. Tall, his face and hands were tanned a leathery brown, his black hair was curly and set close to this shapely skull. He could make any girl's heart do flip-flops.

So I rode with the hunches, and since I was on a job, and that man's help and assistance might be invaluable, I played up to him.

We sipped our drinks and chatted, I crossed my stocking-legged legs high up so my mini-skirted evening gown showed off my thighs bare above my stocking tops, and a garterclasp. Don Miguel fastened his stare on my revelations and licked his full lips from time to time. When I bent to put my cocktail down on the coffee table before the divan where I was sitting, the gown flaps parted to show off my otherwise naked breasts, right down to my big brown nipples.

Oh, I kept him interested, all right.

When a woman in a black and white uniform entered to announce that dinner was ready, Don Miguel stood up. His interest was very pronounced against his tuxedo trouser leg.

His hand caught me by the elbow as he escorted me into the dining room. A large table was set with a white lace tablecloth. The dishes and their accoutrements were edged in solid gold. The water glasses were crystal, ditto the wine

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glasses. Two silver candlebra, each containing three tall lighted candles, were placed on either side of a silver bowl of fruit.

The don lived well, I must admit.

We began our feast with a serving of *quesadillas*—corn turnovers filled with cheese, beans and meat. It was very filling, but it was absolutely delicious. When I exclaimed over its taste, the don chuckled.

"I shall relay your compliments on to Luisa, who is our cook. She is descended from the Aztecs who ruled our land before the conquistadores arrived. Our main dish will be one which Montezuma himself set before Cortes, so you will be eating history with every mouthful."

He was right. The *moles de guajolote* was turkey covered with a piquant sauce. Its aroma was exquisite, its taste even better. I ate as if it were Thanksgiving and I was ten years old again. I never said a word until my plate was clean.

Don Miguel nodded, smiling. "You are the perfect guest, Miss Drum. But do not neglect your Bordegas Cartaviega, a Chilean Riesling served in this squat little bottle called a Steinwein."

His hand lifted the wine bottle, moving it about so the clear liquid inside caught the light and reflected it. A smile touched his lips, as though he dreamed on coming attractions, then he set the Steinwein bottle down and reached for the table bell.

The pretty maid—Carmelita—entered with a dusty bottle wrapped in a white napkin. She showed the bottle to the don, who nodded.

To me he said, "Aguardiente, my dear. It is sugarcane brandy—called 'the fire water' because of its strength. This is an especially good crop, this one."

His forefinger tapped the dusty bottle as he nodded up at Carmelita who turned and carried it away.

"She's very pretty," I murmured.

"She is an Aztec, descended from a band of those Indi-

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ans who fled from what is now Mexico City, when the Spanish conquered it."

"Who were the Aztecs? I've read about the Mayan Indians and the Incas of Peru, but all I know of the Aztecs is that Montezuma was their king when Cortez invaded Mexico."

Don Miguel poured aguardiente as he said, "The Aztecs were of Nahuan stock, a branch of the great Shoshone family. They were very warlike, crude soldiers completely lacking in all the culture which made the Mayas great."

He handed my glass to Carmelita who brought it to my end of the table. He went on thoughtfully, "The Aztecs were barbarians who came through the valleys of Mexico to the present Mexico City roughly two hundred years before the arrival of the Spanish. They had adopted the culture which the conquistadores found in fourteen ninety-two."

"It was the ages old story, of the older, more civilized people falling before the brash newcomers. In time, the Aztecs established their capital at Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City. At this time, the Aztecs were themselves divided in seven clans and not until a little more than a hundred years before the Spanish came, did they elect their first king."

"The grandson of that first king was named Montezuma the First. He set out to conquer and absorb all the neighboring cities in his part of the world and he succeeded. He welded the Aztecs into a great confederacy."

"In fifteen-two, Montezuma the Second came to the throne. He earned the title 'the Great' by establishing an aristocracy of noblemen and lesser kinds. He elevated himself to the role of a god, like the Roman Caesars. Unfortunately for him, in fifteen-nineteen, Hernando Cortez stepped onto Mexican soil. You know the rest of the story."

I nodded, sipping my drink. "And the Mexican Indians

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in your employ? If they're of Aztec descent, how did they get to Baja California?"

"Their legends say an Aztec warrior—I like to think of him as a Trojan Aeneas—fled from Tenochtitlan with other soliders, their women and children. They went northward by night marches, hiding from the other tribes, and came across smooth water to Baja California.

"If Baja California is a barren, remote place now, you may imagine what it was like four hundred years ago. The Aztecs settled here, where they would be undisturbed by their fellow Indians or by the conquistadores."

I objected, "But I'm sure Carmelita—and the other girls, like Dolores and Florita, for that matter—has Spanish blood in her veins."

"Oh, yes. The Spanish soldiery raped a number of Aztec women during the process of conquest. There were pregnant women on that long march to Baja California, pregnant women who gave birth to babies with white man's blood in their veins. There are throwbacks to that heritage in some of the Baja Indians today."

He smiled oddly, then murmured, "They have adopted a few of the white man's vices, as well. Tonight they will—"

Carmelita walked into the dining room, crossed to Don Miguel and bent to whisper in his ear. I saw satisfaction touch his face. He nodded, then rose to his feet, making me a little bow.

"You will excuse me, *por favor*? I have business to attend to."

He went with Carmelita through the swinging door into the huge ranch kitchen. I tiptoed to the rear window of the dining room. Through its glass panes I could make out a dusty man in leather chaparejos and a woolen shirt, his big Mexican sombrero in his hand as he used a sleeve to wipe sweat from his forehead.

Another man was leading away a sweat-stained, dusty horse that looked as if it had run its heart out. I took my

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eyes off the horse because Don Miguel came into view, approaching his exhausted rider.

I can read lips a little, but not when the lips are speaking Spanish, or an Indian patois, which is what the dusty man was talking to Don Miguel. I gathered this was Bernal, boy friend to Dolores, who had been sent to find my non-existent automobile.

His clothes attested to what I suspected: he had gone further than the trans-peninsular highway. But—WHERE? What message did he bring Don Miguel? I started gnawing my lower lip. Then the don clapped Bernal on the back and turned to enter the house.

His face was expressionless, like that of a poker player. It was that fact that alarmed me, for Don Miguel was a Latin, and his face was a barometer to his personal feelings. If he showed no emotion, it was because he dared not betray those feelings.

When he came into the dining room, I was seated, sipping my sugar-cane brandy, observing that now his face was all smiles while apologies poured from his lips. He sat opposite me and lifted his snifter.

"To my guest," he toasted.

"To my host," I smiled.

Both of us were putting on an act, I felt sure. The don, because he knew something about me I didn't know, and me because I was worried sick. Had Don Miguel Dias del Castillo Merida discovered I was a Norte Americano spy-girl? If so, why should that trouble him? He had nothing to hide. Or had he? I made up my mind to find out about that, before the night was very far along.

"You said something about the girls going to do something tonight," I remarked brightly, "just before we were interrupted. Are they holding some sort of fiesta?"

My host nodded. "Actually, it is a very old Aztec ceremony, dedicated to the war god, Xipe Totec, and to the goddess Chalchihuitlicue."

"Oh boy," I commented. "That's some name."

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The don chuckled. "She is the Aztec Venus, the love goddess. Perhaps a better name for her would be the Indian Astarte. Like Venus, she has many names. She is the Lady of the Jeweled Robe, the Queen of All Water. There is to be a ceremony in her honor, later."

"Could I see it?" I asked eagerly.

Don Miguel frowned. "It is—ah—sexual in nature. I'm not sure whether you'd be shocked by it."

"I'm a big girl now," I replied. "A mod chick, a swinger. I've been around, in other words. I'd adore to be shocked a little."

I was feeling the effects of the aphrodisiac that had been in the martini, by this time. And to that the stimulation of the Bordegas Cartavieja and the aguardiente, and my insides were beginning to blaze up. I shifted restlessly on my chair, letting Don Miguel see my gathering excitement.

"Very well, if you are certain you won't be horrified. You see, in this corner of the world, we are very much our own masters. As lord of the hacienda, I am in command of all men and women within more than a hundred miles. I have encouraged the return of our Indians to the old ways, only changing the bloodletting involved. To give them an outlet for their energies, I substituted sex for blood."

His well-manicured hands gestured. "It gives my servants something to look forward to, after their daily chores are done. I trust you will understand."

"But certainly! It's like a far-out discotheque."

His laughter rang out. "Exactly! Instead of the fish and the bugaloo, the Aztec boys and girls get down to fundamentals. Rather than doing suggestive dances, they really—ah—lay it on the line. You will see. Naturally, I will be at your elbow to interpret what is happening."

We sipped our brandy and chatted of odds and ends. Don Miguel was an enchanting conversationalist. He was extremely well read, he kept in contact with the world beyond his ranch borders, he was at once erudite but not egotistical.

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An hour after Bernal had galloped into the ranch compound, my host rose from his chair and came to draw back mine. I tucked my arm in his as he guided me out of the dining room toward the front hall.

"The ceremony will be held out of doors, in a small amphitheater not far away. The goddess enjoys nature, she is best worshipped with the stars overhead and the bare ground underfoot."

We walked perhaps half a mile between flowering marigolds and lilies in the ranch garden, along pathways of crushed stone. The night was comfortably cool, the stars were brilliant overhead, the wind was laden with the lemony scent of sage.

We saw a red radiance against the night sky ahead of us, but its source was hidden until we came to the rim of a natural bowl, a hollow in the ground the slopes of which were buttressed with big rocks that formed crude seats where onlookers could sit.

On the floor of the bowl was a stone altar.

Surrounding the altar were a number of tall torches that lighted the arena with a scarlet hue. On the far side of the altar sat about forty men and women, dressed in their best serapes and rebozos. They paid us no attention, their eyes were fixed upon the stone altar.

"My great-grandfather dug this pit," my host murmured, stepping down onto one of the boulders and giving me his hand. "He wanted a place to gather his help together to tell them news or to give them orders. Since most of his help were Indians, it was he who instituted some of the old Aztec ways. Life was rougher in those days than it is now."

"When his people captured a stranger Indian, an Apache who had come down into the peninsula, or at times even a *mestizo*, great-grandfather would let his people sacrifice him to the goddess."

I gulped, murmuring, "Oh?"

"In the ceremony called the feast of Xipe Totec. It is a

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very old ceremony. It was performed in Tenochtitlan fully a century before the Spanish came to the new world, in honor of Chalchihuitlicue and her mate, the war god.

"To conduct that ceremony properly, you need a captive. A man captive, preferably a warrior taken in battle. This man was tied to a big stone and was given a club with which to defend himself against four Aztec warriors fully armed and clothed in the mottled skins of jaguars."

"A real fair deal," I commented.

"The idea was not to be fair, but vengeful. The jaguar-men attacked and overcame the lone sacrifice. He was killed or at least, mortally wounded. Then he was flayed, the skin being pulled off his body."

I gulped and Don Miguel smiled. We had been moving down the rocks seats until we were almost at ground level. My host gestured me to sit upon a flat stone wedged between two others. He sat close beside me.

Don Miguel continued, "The skin was placed upon the person of a living warrior, so that he might gain the courage and strength of the dead man. Originally, the ceremony was to honor the war god, Xipe Totec. My father changed all that. I suppose because the men they captured to play the part of sacrifice became fewer and fewer.

"Instead of jaguar-men—but I'll let you see the more modern ceremony for yourself. They're coming now."

The Indians across the bowl craned forward on their stone seats, utterly silent. I slid to the edge of the flat stone myself, aware that my heart was thumping in a mad beat.

I could see four girls with jaguar skins wrapped about their lissome brown bodies, with feathered headdresses half hiding their faces, each one carrying not the knobbed clubs of the original jaguar-men but thin whips. Behind the girls, pretending to struggle in the hands of his escorts, six naked women, came a youthful Indian.

He was short in stature, but very muscular, with wide shoulders and a reasonably handsome face. His black hair was free of the headband that had held it, and he wore

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absolutely nothing. He was sexually excited, his manhood was rigidly protruding ahead of him.

"He has been fed drugs," Don Miguel whispered.

Like me. The sight of his readiness for planting pleasure put an itch in my privacy that was already aggravated by the aphrodisiac which had been in my martini. I could not sit still, I kept rubbing my underself against the rough stone on which I sat.

Don Miguel put an arm about my slender waist and drew me to him. "Watch, my fair flower—and see what happens."

I needed no invitation. In the grip of my excited libido, I could do nothing else. Don Miguel, bending his head to kiss my bared shoulder, was not helping me to remain calm.

The six women brought the faintly resisting sacrifice to the stone altar. Their hands flung him spine-down on its top and then caught up the ropes dangling from metal rings inset in the altar and tied his arms by their wrists, his legs by their ankles. They had drawn his legs far apart so that his manhood seemed even more to thrust forward.

"That is the club the jaguar-women give him to fight them off," my host whispered, trailing his mouth down my bare arm.

I nodded numbly. I would have given much to be dressed in a jaguar skin right about now. All I could do was watch those girls and try not to think too much about the kisses Don Miguel was giving me on my back, bared down as far as my buttocks by the evening gown I wore.

The jaguar-women advanced in a dainty dance, chanting some Indian words, their little whips held at the ready. The six captor women had withdrawn. The jaguar girls were alone with their prey.

The first whip touched him gently between his legs, its thongs drawn upward in a tickling motion. The man groaned and arched his back, staring blindly up into the night sky. A second whip teased his phallus, making him

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shudder. The other whips were drawn like spider legs up his thighs and across his taut belly to his chest.

A dancer came closer, nodding when she saw the further increase of his arousal. The youth was moaning steadily, his head moving back and forth. In the old days, he would be fighting for his life, right about now. Today, he was being readied for a different kind of fight.

With a harsh cry, one of the jaguar janes undid two ties that held her fur pelt to her body. It slid down, showing a slim woman with heavy breasts and plump, quivering buttocks. She mounted the altar, posed a moment with her shapely legs spread wide above the male loins.

The man cried out, seeing her forest of love.

Then she was sinking down, impaling herself on him. The male body arched and shuddered. He could strike back only weakly because of his tied-down position, but this may have been a calculated thing. It let the woman on top of him go all out, do all the work, without exhausting him too much.

Three times the girl in the bird-mask convulsed before she lifted herself off the sacrifice and slid to the ground. Her place was taken by a second woman.

Don Miguel was murmuring, "Each of the four jaguar-women will take him in that manner. If he survives their onslaught, if he keeps his male strength, it will be a good omen. If one of the women succeeds in draining him, not only will the coming period be in ill favor with the old gods—the youth himself will be in disgrace."

"Poor devil," I breathed.

My host was sliding his warm hand along my naked side under the evening gown. His caressing fingers went up as far as the heavy globe of my unfettered breast, down to slide all around my upper thigh and hip. His touch was like the whip-thongs that had helped to arouse the sacrifice. As those thongs had teased him to madidiac madness, so his fingertips were building a cunnocnesistic craziness in little old me.

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"You're getting me too excited," I panted.

"Watch—just watch," he murmured.

Another girl had mounted the altar and stood over the face upturned to her widened legs. She made gestures calculated to drive a eunuch wild. The youth played the game, he looked where she wanted him to look while the first jaguar jane operated on his excitement, heaving herself this way and that, shouting out her climaxes, one after the other.

His teeth were sunk deep in his lip, I noticed.

"He seeks by pain to allay the pleasure his body is enduring," my host pointed out, getting his hands inside the non-existent back of my gown and caressing both my sides, now. "He does not want to disgrace his name, he does want to bring good fortune to his people."

"Poor darling," I whimpered.

Don Miguel had his palms under my hard breasts, cupping them, shaking them up and down to arouse my female instincts even more as I watched that scene upon the altar. His arms were sliding me sideways until I got to my feet and sat in the opening he made for me on the stone seat by parting his legs.

I could feel his maleness against my left hip, and started to move against it. I wanted to see what kind of control my host could boast.

On the altar, three women had exhausted themselves on the young man who was still as bullish as he had been while the six women were dragging him to the altar. The fourth jaguar jane climbed naked to his loins as a different girl perched herself above his face.

The Indians on the far side of the arena were murmuring excitedly. Apparently the young man was undergoing an especially difficult test, and coming through with flying standards. The jaguar janes were putting out to make him lower his colors, but he was as adamant as solid rock.

Don Miguel whispered, while pinching my stiff nipples, "It is a trying period coming up for my Aztecs. There are

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terrorist bands in the hills who have been trying unsuccessfully to lure them into their folds, and not succeeding."

It was damn difficult, but I ignored the thrills rocketing my flesh to gasp. "Te-terrorists? In Me-Mexico?"

"Oh, yes. I've heard rumors."

"Ha-have you seen any?"

"Unfortunately, no. If I knew where they were, I would organize my Indians into a vigilante group and shoot them down."

If he was pumping my mind for information he was not doing nearly as well as he was with my body. I was quivering between his spread thighs, leaning back against his chest while his hands stroked and squeezed my breasts. I was in that state the French call *se sentir des velleites*. I was damn hot, and getting even hotter.

Below me, I watched the fourth girl come to fruition, her nude brown back bent like a box, her long black hair hanging down to hide her face and tickle the heaving chest of the *tireuse*-tortured youth. Her hips were flogging the air as she pumped wildly, her orgiastic cires ringing in the ears.

The youth cried out harshly. As he did so the woman crouched above his face dropped downward to blot out that wail of pleasure.

The watching Indians murmured glumly, certain that their hero had weakened in this final moment. Their faces grew longer, sadder, I felt sorry for the young man. But only one person knew the truth, and that was the jaguar jane above his loins.

She had stilled her beat in her own ecstasy, but now her brown buttocks began to shake and jiggle again, as she forced herself toward another orgasm. The Indians cried out in delight, understanding that she could not be doing that unless the young man was still potent.

Still potent he was, several minutes later when the last jaguar jane slipped off him, to crumple to a sitting position on the ground at the base of the altar. The six naked

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women ran to free him. He was still in the grip of the aphrodisiacal drug, however, for as soon as his legs and arms had been liberated, he reached for the nearest woman. He slammed his front against her and fastening his fingers in her soft buttocks, pushed her against the altar.

She shrieked, feeling his arousal.

Don Miguel was lifting the mini-skirt of my black satin evening gown, showing off my legs in their gun-metal nylons and the black garters fastening them, to the torchlight. Up my naked thighs above the stockings went my shirt. My host lifted me to my feet, put his legs together and drew me down with my thighs sprawled apart to rest on his thighs. His thighs weren't the only things I rested on.

He was the answer to a non-maiden's prayer. He was a King Kerkos in his manhood. He was a stallion-man, as the Hindus have it.

I had it, at the moment.

And I knew just what to do with it.

Down below, the sacrifice was still pounding away, but now the spectator had abandoned their passive role to become active participants in the celebration. Men and women had thrown aside their clothes, they were belly-bouncing all over the ground around the altar. Frenzied wails and shouts came up to the flat rock where we played at the reverse jack-knife position.

My host held my breasts in his hands, squeezing them until they ached with pleasure-pain while he fed ecstasy into my female flesh. I stared down at the hypolibidinous happenings on the arena floor, rocking back and forth in my delight. I was out of touch with the world, except where it meant the most. I was Oh Oh Sex in full battle action.

I had forgotten all about the scare boys.

Then Don Miguel whispered, "Are you sure you know nothing about the *terroristas*, Miss Drum?" His hands caught my hips and held them still so he could concentrate on my answer.

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"Of c-course not," I sobbed.

His fingers eased their grip. I went back into action, heaving and squirming. Ecstasy was flooding over me in tidal waves of tingling sensation.

"You won't mind if the police come to question you?" he panted.

I suppose Don Miguel thought he was being smart. He was testing me as a possible member of the terrorist group, he had me marked for a scare mare. I could have laughed except for the fact that my mouth was too busy yelling out an orgasmic release.

An instant later, Don Miguel was echoing my scream.

His suspicions, I hoped, were forgotten.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sure, I could have spilled my guts out to him, but a tiny little voice in a corner of my mind told me to keep playing my part of American tourist. If Don Miguel Dias del Castillos Merida wanted to know more about me, let him find out for himself.

He could help me fight the terrorists, I guess, but I was on a solo spy job, and I wanted no partners other than my case officer. And speaking of the devil, where was David Anderjanian? According to our plans, he should have led the Mexican police to the village of the dead by this time, and cleaned it up.

My female intuition told me such was not the case. I would have heard about it, one way or another. Probably Don Miguel would have told me as a further means to get me to talk about myself.

He didn't quit, I give him that. Over breakfast he said casually, "My man Bernal didn't find your car, Miss Drum. I sent him to fetch it here, you know."

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His face was bland over the platter of ham and scrambled eggs he was downing. His fork was poised above the plate as he awaited my reply.

I shrugged. I was wearing a turtle-necked sweater and a skirt that were both a size too big for my bod, but they were the nearest things to casual wear I could find in the clothes closet upstairs.

Either Don Miguel was not and never had been a married man as he had claimed to be, or his wife bought herself clothes of varying sizes. And no woman ever born would do that. By this time, and with these few clues to work on, I had Don Miguel figured out.

He was a Mexican playboy, he bought clothes to fit the various lady friends he invited to his hacienda from Acapulco or Mexico City. He was afraid of an attack from the terrorists, being so close to their bases of operation. If his Aztecs were to join the scare group, his hacienda would be the first to suffer burning and looting and he himself might be shot down by terrorists bullets.

No wonder the don was so nervous.

I felt a sympathy for him, but I decided not to tell him who or what I was, because the less he knew about me, the better off he would be. Why, by sheltering a L.U.S.T. lady, he might be exposing himself to terrorist retribution.

After breakfast we went for a horseback ride, Don Miguel on his bay, my Drum body perched on a grey mare. We cantered between mesquite trees and various kinds of cacti for over an hour. On the crown of a sloping hill, we drew rein and I reached across to press his hand.

"You've been more than kind, Miguel," I told him, "but I've imposed too much on your hospitality. I think I'd better be on my way, come tomorrow."

His face expressed the disappointment he must have felt, because he protested, "Oh, not tomorrow! There is to be another Indian festivity on a neighboring ranch—another ancient ceremony you won't want to miss. Please stay."

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"I'm sorry. I really must be going."

"But how? Without a car . . ."

I kicked one leg free of the stirrup and waved it in the air. "By shanks mare, Don Miguel. On my own two legs."

"I cannot permit it," he said stiffly. "It would be a disgrace to my name and to my honor. Instead, you shall stay until day after tomorrow. Tomorrow night we shall go see that ceremony I spoke of, and the following morning I will give you the mare you are riding and a picnic lunch and send you on your way."

It would have been impolite to argue, so I shrugged and nodded. "All right. One more day won't make any difference."

That night, Don Miguel was his wittiest and most charming self. He brought in musicians from some of his outlying ranch buildings who performed on their guitars for us. A pretty *mesitzo* girl danced the fandango and then Don Miguel and I joined forces to execute a bugaloo.

It was fun time and I loved every minute of it.

It was also the calm before the storm.

The following afternoon, two saddled horses were brought around to the front of the hacienda by Bernal. Don Miguel and I swung into the kaks, equipped with a bag of sandwiches and two canteens, and set off for a rendezvous point in the Sierra de Lagiganta mountains.

We cantered, we galloped, we walked the horses through one of the most remote regions on Earth. If I didn't know better, I might think we were on Mars. The tall cirios, the brush scattered here and there, the dry sandy soil underhoof, was far away from everything I'd ever known. It was something out of a long-dead world.

It was late afternoon, in that hazy golden time when the sunbeams appear to split apart and flood the air with yellow mists, that the don reined up and pointed. I shaded my eyes and stared.

"See there, Eve. The Aztecs have gathered, the altar is

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ready. The sacrifice to the god is about to make an appearance. Come, gallop so we won't be late!"

It was an eerie setting for the mock sacrificial rite. There was no bowl here, just a flat expanse of plateau, jutting upward from which were the bare trunks and branches of cirio trees, twisted and dead, black in the golden afternoon. Those curving trees seemed to me to be skeletal fingers of rotting corpses thrusting from the ground where they had been buried long ago. Broken and burned by long-forgotten fires, they appeared to clutch at something unseen, as if for mercy.

I shivered, suddenly cold. It was as if Death itself were blowing across the plateau, hungering for the life it soon would claim.

"You're k-kidding about the sacrifice, aren't you?" I asked weakly. "It's going to be like the night before last, isn't it? You know, sex and all that?"

The scene before me told me it was definitely not going to be like the night before last. The Indians gathered here were brooding, their eyes seemed filled with visions of the past, when their ancestors had claimed all this land named Mexico in the name of Montezuma their king.

They were garbed in dark scrapes, their garments under those big shawls were decorated with feathers and with necklaces of bone. Human bones? The men carried wooden clubs from which jutted sharpened stones, like the war-clubs to be seen on the wall paintings which depict the lives of their ancestors.

This was a grim group.

There was no fun in their lives at least not at the moment. I could read sullen pride in their features, a slight touch of fear, a hushed sense of—waiting.

"There will be no sex this night," said the don gravely as he urged his bay forward onto the plateau, down a sloping dirt path. My grey mare followed, with me swaying easily in the saddle. I may have been loose in the kak, but the rest of me was uptight.

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I didn't like the look of things.

So I swung down, when Don Miguel reined in, half expecting the boys in black to pounce on me and heave me up on that altar. But the Indians ignored me, their hard brown faces were expressionless as they watched me pick a path beside my host to a flat stone resting on two smaller rocks, like a crude bench.

It was the place of honor, reserved for the don.

I sat down beside him, just about ready for anything. The sky was turning red—the color of fresh blood, I thought in my moodiness—and that redness seemed reflected in the flat Indian faces surrounding us. It was like they had smeared their features in blood, man. Scarey!

I waited as patiently as I could.

Then I heard a soft, low droning. It came to me after a moment that this was the voices of men chanting. With the voices I heard the faint booma boomp of drums being played upon softly, with rhythmic fingers.

There was a procession coming from the south. I could see the red torches flaring in the gathering dusk, smoky wisps ascending skyward. It was smash stagework. The voices, the drum, the smoking torches gave an added weirdness to the scene.

The Aztecs around me were impressed, Grunts rising from their throats, each man stood like a bronze statue with the wind ruffling the feathers on his body and blowing the fringes of his serape. They were as turned to brown stone, only their eyes were alive, glittering and proud.

These men were seeing a page from their past come to life before them. As the Aztec priests had escorted victims to the altars of their gods, so these descendants of that proud people were staring at their modern-day priests coming at a funereal walk between the tall torches, chanting an ancient dirge.

The drums muted, grew loud; again they muted.

It was great stagecraft. The hairs on the back of my neck were standing in response to that chanting, to the

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drumbeats, to the impressive sight. By craning that neck, I could see something else there, between the marchers.

It was a stretcher, decorated with feathers and with human bones. The stretcher held something long and mounded on it, covered by a ceremonial garment decorated with green jade discs. I had seen pictures of discs like that, found in a tomb in the Temple of the Great Jaguar—a Mayan ceremonial building—in Tikal, Guatemala.

I relaxed a little. There could not be an Indian man or woman under that decorated robe, it was far too large to be any Indian. Heaps of food, piles of sacred vessels, of copal to be burned as incense, were under the blanket.

Don Miguel leaned close. His eyes glittered with an odd fanaticism as he breathed, "The sacrifice to Quetzalcoatl is to be performed by the *nacom*, the high priest selected to make it. He is the tall man in the feathered headdress—which, incidentally, is an exact copy of the headdress worn by the officiant five hundred years ago. He will use the ceremonial stone knife."

I gulped. "The stone knife?"

"You are looking at a page out of history, Miss Drum," Don Miguel whispered, his voice excited and elated. "This is how the Aztecs offered up their victims. It is true that they borrowed the rite from the Mayans, but then they borrowed almost all their culture from their neighbors."

I could not tear my eyes from the jade-decorated robe. The priest would not use a stone knife to stab an offering of vegetables or vases. Only a human sacrifice would require a blade like that. Sweat was forming under my armpits and trickling down my sides.

The procession was almost at the altar.

The acolytes were thrusting the tall torches into the ground, three on either side of that huge stone altar. It was dark by this time, though in the west you could see a faint line of redness where the sun was setting beyond the horizon. The six torch-flames cast an added mystery over the scene.

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The stretcher was lifted to the level of the altar, set down upon it. Chanting, two priests gathered up its folds, slowly lifting it from the feet, folding it neatly at knees and hips.

I knew before I saw the face, who the victim was.

Maybe it was feminine intuition.

Anyhow—I *knew*! And I sat there frozen, not knowing what to do. Inside me, I was terrified. The priests were lifting the last flap of the garment away from the face of the sacrifice, but I did not need to see those features.

David Anderjanian lay there, drugged.

As his face came into view, Don Miguel leaned closer, the better to see my features in the torch-lit darkness. He was breathing harshly, there were suspicion and hate in those glittering black eyes.

I guess he thought I'd jump up and scream.

We L.U.S.T. agents are trained better than that. I sat there staring with my big baby blues and I pride myself that not a muscle of my face moved. All I did was draw a deep breath and turn to my host with my innocent little face hanging out bare for him to study.

"Don Miguel—it's a man!" I whispered, as if surprised.

"Yes, Miss Drum—an American who has thrust his nose where it is not wanted—into the business of all true Mexicans!"

He waited, but I went on playing the ingenue.

"In the old days, the *chacs* held the victim down so that the high priest—the *nacom*—could drive his stone knife into the living victim, cutting out his heart and putting his hand in to draw out that still-pumping heart from the still-breathing chest!"

If he was trying to frighten me, he did a good job. I was uptight, but I was also doing a slow burn. Nobody was going to cut out David Anderjanian's heart while mine was still pounding away in my ribcage!

"There is no need to hold the American down. He has been drugged. And yet, Miss Drum—observe!"

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The drug was wearing off. David was rolling his head from side to side, moaning. On each side of him, the lesser priests were gripping his muscular arms and legs, tensing their bodies to hold him down.

"I suppose it's part of the ritual that the victim be alive," I guessed.

"Yes, he must see the stone knife and know that he is being despatched for the honor and glory of Quetzalcoatl!"

David was opening his eyes. And since he has instant reflexes, he got the message. The stone knife was in the hand of the *nacom*, the *nacom* was chanting as he raised that knife.

My case officer tightened his muscles. The three priests on his right side, where they held his arm, were almost lifted off their feet. Don Miguel had turned his eyes toward the altar, forgetting me for the moment.

It was the opening I needed.

I rose upward, driving the edge of my right hand sideways into my host's throat, right across his Adam's apple. Like hard, man! I swung with all the venom in my heart. Don Miguel gagged, choked. He drew a shuddering breath, lunged to his feet with both hands going to his throat. He swayed, gasping, just about able to breathe.

I was already on my way.

My hand grabbed up a torch, thrust the blazing end into the face of the high priest. He started screaming in agony seconds before I smelled the stench of burning hair and roasting skin.

With the butt end of the long torch, I rammed one of the *chacs* in his belly. He doubled over. I swung the lighted end into the faces of the three priests on the near side of the altar. They had seen what I'd done to the *nacom* and they wanted no part of any such treatment.

They let go of David, *muy pronto*.

David could take a hint. He was off the altar and belting

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one of the *chacs* in the jaw. He kicked a second one in the belly.

I reached for the knife the *nacom* had dropped.

David snatched up a torch and kicked the other two onto the ground where they sizzled and almost went out. He pushed the torch he held into the faces of the three *chacs* on the far side of the altar. Then David was vaulting the altar, grabbing up a torch in his left hand and kicking over the two remaining ones.

"Where away?" he yelled.

"Over here—to the horses!" I screamed back.

I made a path for myself between the stunned Indians by waving red fireflames before their noses, David pounding after me, thrusting his torches right into their faces. The Aztecs fell away, giving us running room.

All this happened in less than half a minute.

The bay and the grey mare were up ahead, near the dirt road leading away from the plateau. David and I ran as if the feathered serpent worshipped by the ancient Aztecs was after us.

I slid a booted foot into a stirrup.

David did not bother with the stirrups, he put his hands on the bay's croup and vaulted upward. His voice was a snarl in the air as he rasped, "Go, Eve—go!"

Behind us, the Indians were snapping out of their lethargy.

We could hear angry shouts, the drum of thudding feet as they came for us. We wheeled our horses, sent them galloping. Around us, it was black night. There was no moon in the sky, just an occasional star. It was like riding across somebody's insides.

We had long ago tossed away the torches, so they couldn't trail us. And since the Aztecs had no horses to ride, since they'd come to the sacrifice on foot, we got out of earshot in short order. For more than an hour we galloped, until finally David yelled to rein up.

The horses blew while we conferred.

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I told David what had happened to me since he went walking off, away from *el pueblo des muertos*. He listened grimly, nodding every once in a while.

When I was finished, he said, "Good girl! I think you've flushed our birds from cover. In Tijuana, Estela and I have been comparing notes—she's been in touch with Mexico City—and we think Don Miguel may be the go-between for Cuba and the Indians here in Baja California. He's the one who gets the rifles and the ammunition for the terrorists, he keeps contact with El Oro and El Raton. I feel sure his Indians are the backbone of the terrorist strength."

"And by catering to their heritage, by giving them sex shows in the name of the Aztec love goddess and blood baths—as human sacrifices to Quetzalcoatl—he makes sure they stay in line. He knows his Aztecs, I guess. At least, he seems to exert a certain control over them."

"The question is, what to do now?"

"We ride to save an Indian village from attack by El Oro," I stated flatly. "The terrorists want to make an example of Secorro and its chief to the other Indians, to force them into their scare group. If we let that happen, we might as well pack up and go home—we'll have had it. I just hope we aren't too late."

"I'm for that," David agreed, spreading his hands and looking down at them. "But what do we do for weapons?"

"Chief, you spend too much time behind a desk," I smiled. "We just go and take them away from the terrorists. They have AK-47s, which are damn good assault rifles, as any Viet Nam veteran will tell you."

David chuckled, "then I'd better let you lead the way."

I eyed his naked bulk with worried eyes. "First, we have to find you some clothes. The sun will cook you to a blistered blob unless your skin is covered."

"Maybe the terrorists can clothe me, too:—if they haven't already staged their raid."

"I don't think that's happened yet. I have the feeling

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Don Miguel calls the shots on their attacks—and my presence in his country worried him more than somewhat.

"No, I feel the don called a halt to terrorist activity for the nonce, until he learned more about me. It's a chance we have to take, of course. But I'm pretty certain he's said to hold it."

"After tonight, there won't be any doubt about you."

"Which is why El Oro will probably get the go-ahead."

"Okay, then—where's the Indian village to be raided?"

"I'm not sure," I muttered.

"Oh, great! All we have to do is scour all Baja California."

"It isn't all that bad. When Nita and her goon girls staked me out to torture me, they were heading south by west. El Oro said that morning before breakfast that they were within three days march of the village."

"Well, it isn't much—but it's something," David commented.

"We're less than two hours from Secorro by my calculations," I said cheerfully.

"So let's ride in and warn them."

I lifted the reins and chirped to the grey mare. We cantered southward, playing it by ear across this wild land where the cirio trees were like fence posts guiding our horses. We rode for more than three hours before we saw a red radiance in the black night. At first sight of that campfire, we yanked back on the reins.

"El Oro," I breathed. "Maybe. Anyhow, I've got to find out."

I slid to the ground, looking up at David. "Get down, you big ape, they may see you against the sky. Tie the horses here and come on foot."

We crept closer to the campfire, making no sound. I had to make certain it was the Gold One and his terrorists before I alerted the Indian village. It never pays to cry wolf in this secret agent business.

Some minutes later I could make out one of the goon

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girls standing guard. The others were on the ground, asleep, and I dared not go any closer in order to recognize them. I figured the goon girl was proof enough.

David and I moved along behind a sloping barranca out of sight and sound of the girl guard. When I judged we were far enough away to be reasonably safe, I waved my hand and led David at a run toward a group of small huts clustered near a running stream.

These Indian huts are still made the way they were fashioned five hundred years ago. Over a framework of saplings tied by vines, a thatched roof is placed. The walls are formed of these same saplings, with room left in the geometric center of one wall for the rectangular door. Wall paintings at Chichen Itza show the same huts as the ones toward which we were loping.

There was no guard. I went into the first of the huts and said, "Anybody home? *Perdone*—but one of you folks had better wake up—*pronto!*"

A dark bulk came off the floor.

"*Quien es?*" a voice asked.

I told him who it was and what we wanted. The dark bulk listened in silence, except for his heavy breathing. Then he said, when I'd finished, "It has come, then—what we have feared."

He said it in such a dull voice that I felt like pinching him. "You aren't going to give up without a fight, are you?" I whispered incredulously.

"I am not the chief. I don't make the decisions."

I said wearily, "Okay, okay—take me to your leader, *mac.*"

The chief was an old man I saw when his wife scratched a light and set a candle wick afire. His face was leathery, wrinkled, framed by his long white hair, but his body was still strong and his black eyes were bright as I talked.

"My friend here and I will fight with you, Calaros," I told him, gesturing at David. "You must have weapons of some sort."

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"Only bows and arrows," the boss-man said. "And some spears with which we hunt wild goats."

"Use them to hunt wild men," I snapped.

David said, "We are going to steal guns, the girl and I. We will attack from one side. You attack from the other. Before it gets light."

The old man was silent a long time. His forehead was even more wrinkled as he scowled in thought. Finally he nodded his head.

"Yes, we will fight the terrorists with you. They will come here and kill us anyhow, so it is better that we act like men and take as many of them with us when we go."

Calaros turned to the dark blob who had come with us from his hut, and by the single candleflame, I saw he was a husky young man clad only in a pair of worn pants that reached to his knees. He was nodding excitedly as his chief hurled words at him.

The chief said to us, "Vittorio here will go with you, to tell the others to take their spears and bows and arrows and fight."

The old man snapped words at his wife who bent and lifted a hide, placing it in his aged hands. Opening the hide, the chief showed us a wooden bow and a hide quiver filled with arrows.

"I have not killed a man since my youth," Calaros murmured, putting the quiver on a scrawny shoulder by its thong. "It was a bad man I killed then. These are bad men I will kill now."

In ten minutes, David and I were moving out ahead of a single line of male Indians. Neither of us had a weapon yet, but we had assured the Indians that we would get those weapons before we gave the signal to attack. The chief was to range his men on top of a nearby hill that looked down onto the terrorists' campfire. He knew where the *terroristas* were sleeping, he and his men knew every inch of this country.

"We shall be ready," he promised.

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So David and I began our crawl along the rocky ground, wincing every so often as a stone dug into us. We angled our sliding bodies toward the dot of red that was the campfire. We took our time, there was no hurry. We wanted dawn to be on the horizon before we began our attack so the Indians could see to aim.

I moved along by digging my elbows into the ground and dragging the rest of me after them. My eyes were never on the girl guard leaning her shoulder against the bole of a cardon tree; to stare at her too steadily might warn her by making her uneasy.

When I was five yards away, I saw that this was no longer the goon girl but Nita herself lounging against the treebole. I nodded in appreciation of the Fates that had arranged this confrontation.

My hand went into my jodphur pocket and came out with a length of plaited maguey I had borrowed from Caloras. Maguey is a member of the agave family, with fleshy leaves. From it were made lariats and lassos in the old days. Its fibres are tough, yet easy to work.

My fingers made a loop with the maguey rope in my hands. I came off the ground, hidden by some bushes. I stepped forward to one side of the tree-trunk.

Nita never saw the rope that went over her head until it was too late. My hands tightened the rope, digging it into her soft throat. She gagged, she tried to kick, her eyes opened wide, but she could not cry out. I swung her sideways so David could slip her rifle off her shoulder by forcing her left arm down.

Into her ear I breathed, "Remember me, Nita? Raquel girl? You left me to die in agony, you bitch! But I got away."

I did not let her see my face, since she would have known I was not Raquel. My voice did not betray me, especially since Nita had no way of knowing it wasn't really Raquel behind her. I am afraid I tightened the maguey

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rope slowly, to let her suffer some of the pain I had endured before that stake pulled out.

She went to her knees. Her hands, that had been clawing at my wrists, shook uncontrollably as her body bucked spasmodically. She was dying in my hands, and she sensed there was no rescue for her.

I let her go, watched her slump across the ground.

She never stirred again.

David decided it was too risky to try and get another attack rifle. He would handle the one we'd taken from Nita, while I waited an opportunity to steal another.

The sun was beginning its lift over the Sierra de Lagigante mountains, a red haze showing where the night ended. The Indians would have enough light to see by, now.

David lifted the AK-47.

His finger hit the trigger. Bullets ploughed the ground, then zeroed in on the sleeping men and women. At the first explosion from the Red Chinese rifle, the *terroristas* came swarming up out of their sleeping bags. Their faces were bleary with sleep, their senses dull.

But they understood they were being attacked, and they reacted. Savagely snarling, they reached for their rifles.

"Surrender!" yelled David. "You're surrounded."

"Go to hell," El Oro rasped.

His own gun was in his hand. It came up, aiming at me and David. I held my breath, waiting for David to protect me.

David panted, "It's jammed!"

Then El Oro stiffened. His body took three steps forward and in the uncertain light I saw a spear transfixing his body. Arrows were whizzing in the air. One by one, the sleep-stupified *terroristas* were being skewered by those primitive shafts.

I made a diving leap for the AK-47 that El Oro was letting slide from his fingers. My hands shot out, caught it

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before it could hit the ground. I landed on my belly, the assault rifle chattering its leaden message at the enemy.

El Oro croaked, "You! Raquel—I thought you were dead . . ."

He fell full length alongside me. I thought for a moment he was trying to choke me to death but he died in the middle of his fall. I pushed his dead body to one side and looked around for somebody to shoot at.

Only David and I and the Indians were alive.

Oh, yeah?

Coming at a run over the nearest hill were about twenty-two or more *terroristas*. They had spanking new assault rifles in their hands. And they were lead by a man who must be el Raton, the Mouse.

In this moment of stunned frustration, my mind told me I had seen this man before. I stared at his brown face and the brown curly hair with the fluffy brown sideburns. His lips were overfull and his neck was very thick. There was a hairline scar across that neck.

Of course! This man was the bachelor in Tijuana who had been bidding for Estela Lopez, the man who'd lunged at me seconds before David Anderjanian clobbered him. He had probably been in command of the terrorists in Tijuana, now he was in command of these men.

His right arm lifted, pointing.

In response, his men lifted their AK-47s, aiming at us.

CHAPTER EIGHT

We were sitting ducks for that broadside.

David held a jammed gun, the Indians had only their bows, arrows and a couple of spears left to them. I was on the ground, my assault rifle lifting toward them, when they pulled their triggers.

I expected to see David and the Indians mowed down by the first hail of lead. The only thing was—there was no leaden hail. The AK-47 guns began blowing up, just as soon as the triggers were pulled.

There seemed to be a single loud blast, an explosion that rang in the ears. And then they were crumpling, falling as if by flattened by a giant, unseen fist.

"What the hell?" David whispered, shaking in reaction.

The Indians were kneeling, bowing toward the east, crying out the name of their god, Quetzalcoatl. It must have seemed like a miracle to them, because it damn well seemed like a miracle to David and me.

Nautrally, I knew what had happened.

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I did not tell Caloras and his warriors, however. I went along with their belief that their god had protected them. The chief, tears in his eyes, was turning toward me as David helped me to my feet.

"You saw? You saw? The god killed all of them! He made them destroy themselves!"

"He sure did, chief. Now you know we're the good guys." I told him.

The chief nodded, fully satisfied. "We shall help you fight the terrorists, golden woman. My men will guide you, take you where you want to go in this land."

"Just bury the dead," I told him, smiling.

David growled, "What the hell did happen, back there?"

"You heard the man," I told him, jerking a thumb at the chief. "Quetzalcoatl looked down and spared his people."

He caught my wink and played up to it, but when we were mounted and riding away from the village, he growled out his dissatisfaction with the protective deity theory. "Maybe those Indians will swallow that, but not me."

"All right, all right," I told him. "I did it."

His face got that down-the-nose, come-off-it look that so endears my case officer to me. "You? Oh, come on, now! You don't expect me to swallow that. I mean, you're a damn good operative but—"

"Not only did I do it, I even told you how, when I told you everything that had happened to me since we parted company," I answered sweetly.

He waited patiently. He had taken the opportunity to put a khaki shirt and a pair of trousers on his big Viking body—they did not fit him, they looked like U.S. army issue before the recruits get around to swapping clothes—but he was dressed. Maybe it was the clothes, but at the moment he was his old dear, most ornery self. His scowl was as black as the inside of a snake's belly.

"Remember the pebbles?" I asked sweetly. "How I

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dropped them into the rifle barrels and wedged them in with a *cardon* stick?"

David grinned and it was like the rising of the sun. His blue eyes got gleeful and his mouth opened to roar like a bull bellowing in heat. His huge arms came out, they wrapped around me, they half dragged me from the saddle while he kissed me all over my dirty face.

"Dearest Eve! Blessed Eve!" he shouted. "I love you!"

"You said it, you said it," I accused, trying to wriggle free. David is sometimes overdemonstrative, I think.

When his kisses and congratulations had died down to a couple of brotherly pats on the back, I asked, "What about you? How'd you get caught by those Aztec anarchists?"

"I went back to the road after leaving you in the village of the dead, and started north, walking as fast as I could. Then some guy demonstrating the take-it power of a Rebel car in Baja country came along and gave me a ride."

My eyebrows arched a little at that, but I kept silent. David went on talking, not noticing my upraised eyebrows because he wasn't looking at me.

The Rebel driver had let him off at Tijuana, right in front of our motel. Estela was still there, trying to make arrangements for a helicopter flight over the western slopes of the Sierra de Lagigante mountains to search for us and find out if we'd had any luck yet.

"While I was making preparations to lead a police detail against *el pueblo des muertes*, a message came from a small goat rancher saying you were in fever and delirium and could I come. So I went.

"This time I came a little better prepared. I came in a car and parked it in an arroyo a hundred yards off the road, if you can call that dirt ribbon a road. I walked toward the goat ranch.

"Two dozen Indians jumped me. We had a free for all for about ten minutes, then somebody batted me over the head with a club." His huge shoulders shrugged. "I came

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to, from time to time, enough to see I was being held in some sort of adobe cellar. Night before last they stuck a hypo needle in me. I woke up on the altar with you trying to rescue me."

"So now we find your car and go back to Tijuana?"

"No, I'm going to call Estela on the short wave radio sending set, alert her to the danger and make plans for us to capture this Don Miguel Dias del Castillo Merida."

We galloped our stolen horses through the early Mexican morning. By the time the sun was well up in the sky, we were swinging down out of the kaks and David was inside his Mustang signaling for Estela Lopez to come in on the short-wave band.

Estela was so delighted to hear that David Anderjanian was safe, she practically slobbered on the other end of the mike. "That's nice," she offered casually when David told her I was alive and well, too. David is attractive, I realized.

The police were going to raid the village of the dead. As a matter of fact, they were already on their way. Estela would have to hurry to stop them, to tell them to turn aside from *el pueblo des muertas* and attack the Merida ranch instead.

"How shall we do it, David?" Estela purred.

David looked at me for hints. I stuck my tongue out at him. He grinned, winked, and said to the mike, "We'll work out details at this end. I think if Eve and I—"

"—and me," chimed in Estela.

"All right, and you—were to enter the ranch and see if Don Miguel is there, we could arrange a signal with the police and—"

"What sort of signal?" Estela interrupted.

"I don't know as yet. We'll think of something, once you're down here with us. As soon as the police see that signal, they'll know everybody is inside the ranch, so they can come raiding."

I leaned over and waved my hands frantically, saying,

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"He has plenty of Indians to fight for him. Tell your police to come in force. I don't want anybody writing 'too few, too late,' on my epitaph!"

"Bring a lot of cops, Estela. Fighting cops who know how to shoot."

Estela gurgled on the other side of the mike. "It sounds like fun, *querido!*"

"Yeah," I muttered.

They broke contact. David looked thoughtful. "Just what will we make as a signal, Eve? I'm thinking ahead. We may be spotted, we may have to do some hard fighting before the police can get there. We want a signal it won't take but a second or two to let go—but something distinctive enough for them to recognize."

"It'll take some thinking," I admitted, frowning.

David stretched out in the car, putting his hands behind his head and resting hands and head on the seat, his legs on the far door. He looked relaxed and at his ease, despite his ill-fitting garments and the hot sun beating down.

"Think, Eve," he ordered.

I glowered at him, but I thought.

We were roughly five hundred miles south of Tijuana, I was thinking. It will take Estela Lopez at least two days to reach us, considering the lack of good roads between Ensenada and our rendezvous point. Two days alone with big David Anerjanian. I let my eyes consider his six-foot-four frame. It might be fun to drain him of his libido largesse before that Mexican hat dancer, Estela Lopez, got her pretty brown fingers on him.

I nixed the idea. It was too hot.

I slid down onto the back seat and fell asleep.

My eyes opened to the smell of sliced ham in my nostrils. David was grinning, waving a ham on rye with mustard under my nose.

"David, you darling!" I screamed, reaching.

"I told you I came equipped, this time. I have a picnic

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hamper in the trunk, together with a freezing cabinet that operates on the car battery. Care for some cold soda pop?"

"Nothing else? Like scotch, maybe?"

"Not on duty, Oh Oh Sex," he answered virtuously.

So we ate and slept and sweated out the next two days. Around midday of the third day, Estela Lopez pulled off the road in a dusty Chevelle. She waved a bare arm as the sunlight glinted on her Foster Grants.

"Olé!" she cried.

A bandanna in psychedelic colors fluttered from her head. Under it, her long back hair was like a shimmery waterfall. She pushed open the door. Her slim brown legs, bare to her upper thighs, swung out. She laughed delightedly as she stood up.

She was wearing a crocheted white cotton eyelet mini-dress under which was her bare brown body. Oh, yeah. I do believe she had a scanty panty thing around her girlish loins.

She came running, her body doing a dance all its own at breasts and buttocks, to hurl herself into David's arms. She planted a juicy kiss on his lips. They held the pose for a number of seconds, maybe sixty or so.

Estela drew her lips back, but not the rest of her, as she said sweetly, "And dear Eve! However are you?"

"Just great," I made myself say.

"I have bad news," she pouted up at David, nudging him with her middle for emphasis. "The police are already on their way to *el pueblo des muetes*. I could not contact them in time. However, I did send a man to bring them word that we would be on our way to Don Miguel's ranch. They will meet us there."

"In time?" I wondered.

"Oh, yes. We are very efficient, we Mexican police. All we need to do is signal, and the police will attack. It is very simple."

"You aren't going into that ranch house dressed like that, are you?" I also wondered. So I was being catty, but

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David Anderjanian was my unofficial boy friend and this Mexican doll was delectable dynamite in that see-through mini-dress. Her dark brown nipples were erect (that had been some kiss with which she had greeted David!) and sticking boldly out of two eyelet openings.

"You don't like it?" she asked, wide-eyed.

"I do," said David.

"You would," I snorted.

Estela Lopez smiled at me with her big black eyes. "I have brought you a dress to wear too, dear Eve. And a garment for darling David. We shall be three mod people lost in Baja California. To fool Don Miguel, you know, when we appear at his ranch."

"Ohh, no," I groaned. "Honey, Don Miguel has seen me, he knows me. No matter what you give me to wear, he'll recognize me. He has also seen that big blonde hunk you've been bellying up to. So when we go into that ranch it has to be at night, without letting ourselves be seen at all."

Estela looked as if she would cry. A big change had come over her since that night we had spent together in the motel. Instead of a shy police lieutenant, she had come on strong as a Groovy Gussie. I guess we showed her what she had been missing all her life.

"I did wrong?" she gulped.

David hugged her with a big arm. "You did fine, but it's like Eve says. We go in at dark, unseen. I love you in that dress, but it's got to go."

"But what'll I wear?" she wailed.

"We'll work something out," I promised.

What we worked out was, David gave her the shirt off his back. Literally. It had been tight on him, it swam on her. It came down to the middle of her thighs, and the sleeves were about a foot too long. She rolled the sleeves up, but the rest of it was like a khaki tent.

We let her keep her pumps. She could hardly walk barefoot over that rocky terrain. We also gave her a Colt

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.32 to strap about her middle under the shirt so it would appear that she was unarmed. David and I still had our AK-47 assault rifles.

"What about that signal?" David asked. "We can't hope to take the ranch house by ourselves. We need police help, and to get that, we've got to have some sort of signal."

"I've been thinking," I admitted. "You have knapsacks, I saw them in the car trunk. Suppose we make ourselves a Molotov cocktail?"

"Is that like a margarita?" asked Estela.

David grinned, "It's a lot more fiery, honey." Then he mused, "A Molotov cocktail, disguised as a bottle of aguardiente."

"Why aguardiente?" I wanted to know. "Why not tequila?"

"I happen to have a bottle of aguardiente in the trunk," David chuckled. "I don't have any tequila."

So by siphoning off some gasoline, by using a twist of cotton doused with garoline, we made ourselves a Molotov cocktail. The aguardiente we emptied onto the dry ground, much to David's disgust. We didn't dare drink it, we'd have been too smashed to do our job right.

So with the Molotov cocktail in the knapsack on David's disgust. We didn't dare drink it, we'd have been too smashed to do our job right.

So with the Molotov cocktail in the knapsack on David's back, we set out for the Merida ranch. David drove us as close as he could. We would have to go the rest of the way on foot.

I was to be the guide.

We had no problem, except for a covey of owls who seemed to follow us step by step, hooting at us all the way. We never saw one, we just heard them. From time to time, David would swear under his breath, wishing a sudden death to all owls.

"If they don't shut up, everybody around the ranch will be wide awake!" he snarled.

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I brought them within sight of the ranch house without any trouble, however. We had not been seen. There was nobody around. We passed the arena where the Indians had celebrated the sacrifice to Xipe Totec.

With me in the lead, we moved through the ranch gardens, using the bushes and some mesquite trees as cover. There were lights on in the ranch house itself, it looked as if Don Miguel was having a party. We lurked in the shadows for half an hour, waiting for those lights to go out. From time to time we caught snatches of laughter.

I was puzzled. Don Miguel should not be in such a happy mood. I had rescued David Anderjanian and made off with his horses, we had annihilated the two terrorist groups sent to punish the Indian village for not sending men to join the *terrorista* bands. We knew Don Miguel Dias del Castillos Meridan was something of a big shot in the scare group. He should be out in the hills, hiding.

Instead, he was throwing a bash.

It didn't add up.

I started to worry. We were bellydown in the bushes, to one side of the garden. David was to my right, Estela was beyond him. We had been lying here for half an hour with the ranch house under observation, waiting for those lights to dim.

I put my hand out, touched David. He leaned closer. I told him my worries. He looked worried himself, nodding his head when I was done.

"I've been thinking along the same lines," he muttered.

"Maybe we'd better take a rain check on this? Come back tomorrow night or the night after? In force, with the police to side us? I am getting the feeling that it would be a hell of a lot safer."

"Let's back out. Tell Estela."

We wriggled between the bushes, Estela going first, David next and me last. Suddenly, I heard the Mexican policewoman cry out.

"Ssssh!" I hissed.

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Something poked me in the middle of the back. I turned my head and found myself looking into the muzzle of an old Savage rifle. A grinning Indian was crouched down, holding the gun so that if he pulled the trigger, its bullet would take the top of my head off.

Estela gurgled, "They're all around us."

So they were, at least ten of them. They were wearing moccasins on their feet in true Indian style. They had made absolutely no noise as they crept up on us. I lay there, sweating.

"Get up, get up," my Indian grinned.

They snatched away our rifles, they lifted Estela's shirt and found her Colt and the shell-belt strapped about her naked middle. They took both. One of the Indians put a palm to his mouth and made a loud hooting sound, like an owl.

Understanding burst in me. Those owls we'd been hearing even since we had stepped onto Merida ranch land were explained. These Indian servants of Don Miguel had had us in view all the way.

One of the Aztecs laughed.

"We are not the fools you seem to think us," he growled. "This is our land, we know its ways, its secrets. Don Miguel told us you might come here. We have been on the lookout for you."

A rifle barrel prodded my spine. "*Andele! Andele!*"

We got moving, all the way to the ranch house. I did not dare look at Estela or David. Me, I felt like bawling. All our clever little plans for capturing Don Miguel as head of the *terroristas* were useless. We had been caught like mice in a trap.

The horrible thought touched my mind: if we had been taken so easily, so would the police! There would be no help for us. I think Estela was thinking the same thing, because she was blinking hard against tears. David was very glum.

As we came in the front door, Don Miguel was standing

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in the hall to welcome us. He had a happy smile pasted on his face, and he was rubbing his hands together.

"Come in, come in—all of you. Ah, Miss Drum—welcome back to my hacienda. And you have brought your friends with you. Excellent!"

His laughter rang out. "I cannot tell you how delighted I am to have you as my guests. You made me quite angry by rescuing your American friend from the sacrificial knife a few nights ago. You see, my poor Indians get so little amusement. There was to have been a sacrifice to their gods, to induce them all to join forces with our terrorist bands. You spoiled all that, for a little while, I am afraid.

"And you quite definitely spoiled our attack on the Indian village, didn't you? Killed off both those groups. A shame, really a shame. We shall have to begin all over again. But elsewhere, yes. This is much too popular a visiting place, my ranch."

Don Miguel waved a hand. Rifles prodded us out of the hall and into the brilliantly lighted dining room. The table was set for four people. Candles were lighted, there were wine glasses and plates half filled with food on a lace tablecloth. Three men and a woman sat at the table, smiling at us.

Don Miguel gestured. "Allow me to present Su Tsai, a Red Chinese agent who has been on a political visit to Cuba . . ."

A Chinese woman in a somewhat tight cheongsam that outlined small breasts and a slim torso, inclined her head. Hate smouldered in her black eyes as she studied us.

She said coldly, "Is good you caught them."

Don Miguel said, "My dear Madame Tsai! I can out-think any American spy they send down here. I knew they would come to arrest me. My Aztecs are superb scouts. Within minutes after this man and woman attacked El Oro and the *terroristas*, one of my agents from the village itself was on his way to tell me the news.

"I realized then that I would be under suspicion, that

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my ranch house would be the target of their attack. So I took precautions. I assigned all my available ranch hands to stand guard duty. Like good children, these three came walking into my embrace."

He turned to the two men. "This is Andres Galdos, a Cuban revolutionary, a dear personal friend of Fidel himself, who has honored me by his visit."

A dark, fat Cuban glowered at us as he sipped his wine. He wore the khaki uniform of the Fidel Castro revolutionaries. The don said, "What Che Guevara was trying to do in Bolivia, Andres Galdos is doing in Mexico."

"The Americas for Red China," Galdos growled, putting the wineglass down and belching.

The other man was Chinese. His face was bland, his eyes expressionless. He said in a flat voice, "I shall introduce myself, senor Merida. I am Kang Chow, Miss Drum. You have never seen me, but I am sure you recall the name of T'zu Hsi. T'zu Hsi was my friend. You choked him to death, in Hong Kong.* I vowed to pay back his death, if ever I caught up with his killer. The gods have been kind to me."

I shivered under his cold stare. He could do what he said, too. The way Don Miguel looked at him, I knew the Mexican rancher was subservient to the Chinese. It was Red Chinese money financing the terrorists and I gathered that Kang Chow might hold the purse strings. If Don Miguel wanted to go on collecting a big fee for fronting the Red Chinese in their terrorist activities here in Mexico, he had damn well better kowtow to Kang Chow.

Su Tsai smiled at David Anderjanian. "Let us not leap to angry conclusions, my brother revolutionaries."

The Cuban stared at her as if she had gone mad. "Angry conclusions? We feel these three have broken the back of our promising beginning! Remember those two agents

* THE LADY FROM L.U.S.T. No. 3: The 69 Pleasures

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they slew in Tijuana, also—aside from what damage they have done here in Baja California!”

The Chinese woman went on smiling. “True, true. I do not ask that they be forgiven, or turned loose. All I ask is that we take our time with them. We must enjoy this moment of our triumph.”

Fanaticism lighted the black eyes of Kang Chow. “Ahhh! My colleague suggests we torture them to death?”

Su Tsai shook her head. “Nonsense. It isn’t what I meant at all. I want to degrade them, to teach these capitalist pigs they are like slaves—or animals—in our enlightened eyes. The great Mao Tse-tung has declared that we are the people on whom the whole world depends. It is time the capitalist dogs knew this—and demonstrated that knowledge!”

Don Miguel caught on. His hand went to the collar of the khaki shirt Estela Lopez was wearing and with one vicious yank, tore it off her. Her body was stark naked, except for the scanty bikinis about her soft hips. The panties were a trifle snug, her soft womanflesh bulged above and below the black nylon.

Andres Galdos sat up, his fat face split with a big grin. “Madame Tsai is a very remarkable woman. I think her idea has merit. We will degrade them!”

The dour Kang Chow shook his head, but he stared at Estela’s breasts and licked his lips even as he said, “I believe you misinterpret the thoughts of the great Mao, dear madame—but on the other hand, perhaps you do not.”

“The man,” said the smiling Madame Tsai. “Don’t you think we should strip him down too—in case he might have a weapon hidden somewhere on his body?”

“A clever suggestion,” nodded Don Miguel. “Why don’t you conduct the examination yourself, Madame Tsai?”

She nodded happily, finished the wine in her glass and came to her feet. She was slim but ripely curved in the satin cheongssam that hugged her body. She was an attractive woman, her skin was a pale gold and her face,

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though somewhat full, was almost beautiful. Her lashes were black and long. Her mouth was bright red with lipstick, and very full for a Chinese.

He red-nailed fingers went to David's naked chest. Her soft palms smoothed across his pectoral muscles, his tiny nipples, the washboard-like muscles, of his torso. He was a giant alongside the small Su Tsai. She took a perverse delight in their difference in size, judging by her wicked smile.

"Have you ever heard of the Empress Wu Hu of China, American?" she breathed, letting her palm slide down his front to touch him between his thighs. David quivered and drew back slightly.

"I've heard of her. She ruled China during the T'ang dynasty. She succeeded T'ai Tsung to the throne and ruled for eighty years. Between the two of them, they extended China's boundaries to include Manchuria and parts of Mongolia, and set China's borders to the south as far as India, to the west as far as the Aral Sea."

"I am as surprised by your learning," Madame Su Tsai confessed, "as I am by the outlandish size of your—*yang*. Truly, you are a giant man."

David didn't bother to answer that, so Su Tsai continued, "And have you ever heard how the Empress received ambassadors from foreign governments?"

His eyes flickered and he appeared to stiffen.

The Red Chinese woman laughed. "Yes! To show her contempt for them, to convince them they were far beneath her, she made each man perform a certain act upon her person. I see by your face that you have studied your Chinese history well. Do you think the ambassador from Korea, say, felt degraded when he kissed her *yin*?"

"I'm sure he did," David growled.

"Most excellent! You shall kiss me, pretending I am the Empress Wu Hu." Her sharp eyes studied David. She smiled, "And if you do not please me, these pretty girls

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who have been so misled as to try and stop our terrorist movement here in Mexcio—shall regret your refusal.”

She turned and walked back to her chair. She sat down and pointed to the floor between her sandaled feet. Don Miguel pushed David forward.

At the same time, one of our Indian captors brought a torch from the kitchen, a length of dry cardon wood flaming at one end. At a sign from Don Miguel, he went to stand behind the shivering Estela.

“The torch will kiss the girl unless you kiss me,” Madam Tsai was saying. Her hands were gathering the long skirt of her cheongsam in her hands, lifting it to her knees and then drawing the material up her slim golden thighs.

She had very handsome legs. In the electric lights of the dining room chandelier, every eye was fastened on them. I was looking, so was Estela Lopez. David was scowling, but his eyes were held by that slow revelation. And despite the fact that he was shivering, I knew he would do what the woman commanded.

Alive, we still had a chance. Dead, we would have none at all. And so David Anderjanian would sacrifice his manhood to hold off that death for just a little while more. He quivered once, spasmodically, while he seemed to fight an inner battle.

The tight cheongsam was up to her hips, now. Those golden thighs were smooth, plump, widening above the dimpled knees. Madame Tsai may have been in her late thirties, but her legs were those of a younger woman. She smiled proudly as she lifted the slit garment, widening those thighs, showing off the shaven mound.

“Kneel!” she cried hoarsely, opening her thighs still more.

David knelt, a red tide of embarrassment flushing his neck and face. He knew it was useless to argue; he did not want that flaming torch touched to Estela or to me. He put his hands out, ran them slowly up those softly fleshed

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thighs. Then he bent forward and kissed what the woman offered by thrusting up her naked hips.

"Capitalistic pig!" she gasped, shivering. "You are my lapdog! You are not a man—but a beast! Go on—don't stop! Just so will Red China conquer your America, as I have conquered you this night!"

I could not watch. I put my eyes to the ceiling, to the walls, and then to one side of the scene at the dining room chair, where one of the serving girls—it was Florita—was emptying the contents of David's knapsack on a small serving table. From time to time she glanced at David and Madame Tsai, her eyes expressionless.

How my hands itched to get hold of that innocent-looking bottle of aguardiente! It wouldn't do any good to signal, the Aztec servants of Don Miguel certainly wouldn't let the police in if they had been able to catch us! But if I—

"Miss Drum!"

"Huh?"

I turned my attention from the serving table to Don Miguel. He was standing beside Estela, hugging her to him while staring at me.

"Kang Chow says he would like to see what you look like, underneath those dirty clothes. Why not oblige the man?"

"The hell with him!" I snapped.

Kang Chow rose to his feet. His face was as black as the proverbial thundercloud. From under this jacket he lifted out a penknife. "I shall cut her clothes off, Don Miguel. It shall be more—enjoyable—that way!"

"And if she tries to stop you," added the don, bringing out a cigarette and lighting it, "her lady friend here will suffer for it!"

He held the lighted cigarette so Estela could see it.

I held myself motionless as Kang Chow approached, showing his teeth in a big grin. He put the point of the

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knife to the thread holding one of my blouse buttons. The knife moved, the button flew through the air.

In a moment, my blouse was buttonless. The Red Chinese was breathing rather hard. His hands pushed the flaps of my blouse aside to reveal my thrusting breasts. I am afraid the sight of David kneeling before Su Tsai and kissing her privacy, the sounds she was making in her writhing enjoyment of that labial caress, had excited my libido.

My nipples were up stiff, my blue-veined breasts were swollen more than somewhat. At sight of them, Kang Chow gurgled, putting his palms to them. Around my breasts went those hands, with a feathery touch. His hands caught my nipples between forefingers and thumbs and tugged on them gently, began slowly to rotate them.

I moaned. I just couldn't help it.

Estela was staring from my breasts to David's head, buried between the golden thighs of the moaning Chinese woman. Her own breasts seemed bigger, her nipples longer. Behind her, I caught a glimpse of Don Miguel fondling her naked buttocks.

Andres Galdos cried, "Enough!"

Everybody stared at him like he was off his nut. He was standing by the edge of the table, glaring at Estela and me, his right hand opening and closing. A vein at his temple was throbbing fiercely.

"Let us go about this in a sensible way," he choked. "If we are going to have an orgy—let us be at our ease! Let us go to the bedrooms and—"

"You forget yourself, comrade," murmured Kang Chow. "We are not indulging in an orgy. We are teaching these capitalistic pigs that we are their superiors. Their stupidity has brought them to this plight. We shall teach them a lesson before we kill them."

"We could be more comfortable," I murmured, suddenly.

Estela glanced at me in horror. David could not turn his

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head, Madame Tsai had wrapped her soft thighs about him, legs crossed at the knees behind his neck, holding him to her personal slavery. She was in the throes of ecstasy, she did not hear what we said any more than David did. Her hands clasped in his hair, her head was thrown back.

Kang Chow snorted, "Capitalist decadence!"

Don Miguel was suspicious. He took his eyes off my breasts pushing naked out of the opened blouse long enough to glance at my face. "I do not trust the blonde woman," he said slowly. "She had a reason for wanting to get us out of this room."

"What reason could she have?" Kang Chow asked.

Oh, I had a reason, all right. I itched to get my hands on the Molotov cocktail that was disguised so perfectly as a bottle of aguardiente. I had to give the police a signal. Sure, I knew the police might not see it, that they might all be prisoners of the Aztecs who served Don Miguel.

But maybe—just maybe—they had not been caught.

If they had been taken prisoners, word should have come to Don Miguel. The Indians had marched us in, they had not held us outside. Besides, I felt that if the Aztecs had caught those police, we would have heard gunshots. The police would never have given up without some sort of fight. And the night was very silent, very still, outside the hacienda.

So—if I could signal them, they just might see that signal and come rushing in. It was our only chance.

But I could never reach that Molotov cocktail and heave it through a window so it would explode outside on the hacienda lawn—without being stopped. There were too many people in the dining room. I had to thin out the crowd, get them out of here and somewhere else.

Then I could make my break, race up here to an empty room, snatch up that aguardiente bottle and throw it. This was my reasoning. Fortunately, two of the Commie comrades were going along with it.

Andres Galdos was nodding at the edge of the table

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where he still stood. "I agree with Kang Chow. What reason could she have? I vote we go downstairs to that game room you have fixed up, Don Miguel."

The rancher shrugged. "So be it. I don't know what reason she has herself, but if you say go downstairs, then we will."

I dimpled a smile at Kang Chow. "If I'm going to die, I might as well die happy. In comfort. If we might have a little food, some wine?"

Don Miguel gave the orders to a staring Florita. She whirled and disappeared as Kang Chow went over to Madame Tsai, who was writhing and wriggling in the throes of her orgasmic pleasure.

"Come, madam Tsai!" he snapped. "Forget your ecstasy at the kiss of the decadent capitalistic to join us downstairs where we shall be more comfortable."

"I'm very comfortable where I am," she murmured blissfully.

But Kang Chow urged her to comply, so reluctantly, Su Tsai uncrossed her golden thighs, releasing a harshly breathing David Anderjanian. She leaned forward, caught his face in her hands and kissed him with open mouth.

I was a little stunned. I guess he had really gotten to her where she lived. She really doted on my sometime boy friend. Her nimble fingers were undoing his belt, she was leaning forward to push his too-tight trousers down.

"Enough," rasped Kang Chow. "Behave yourself!"

She turned her head to glower at him, snapping, "We're not in China now, Kang Chow! I am as good a Maoist as you, but nowhere does the great Mao say we mustn't behave as human beings!"

Her smile enveloped David as she turned to him. "And I am feeling very human now. Very human!"

David had his pants half on, half off, as he got to his feet. Madame Tsai still clung to him, she was trying to hug his big bare chest and nibble at his shoulder with her tiny white teeth while he held her to him with his left arm.

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Kang Chow was lifting my blouse off so I would be a topless *turista* while I walked with him down into the game room. To one side of us, Don Miguel and Andres Galdos walked on either side of an almost naked Estela Lopez.

I watched her jouncing buttock cheeks, naked under the black scanty panty she wore around her loins. They were big brown melons shaking like Jello to her stride, but they did not distract me as much as they distracted Kang Chow.

He stared from my jiggling breasts to those bouncing buttocks like a man at a tennis match. I took this opportunity of his inattention to turn my head and take one last look at that bottle of aguardiente. I wanted to fix its position in my memory, because Florita was dousing the candle flames and in a few moments, the dining room would be in utter darkness.

CHAPTER NINE

The game room was a bit of a revelation.

The floor was blue wall-to-wall carpet, the walls were wood-panelled in polished mahogany. Pictures hung on the walls, framed and lighted. The pictures were blown-up photographs of men and women employed in varied intimate acts. They stood out in startling clarity in that otherwise dimly lighted room.

Madame Tsai cried out at sight of them. She led David to the middle of the room, knelt and stripped off his too-tight pants. Naked, David seemed like some erotic Norse god come to life. He towered above the smaller Su Tsai, and his pot walloper was the center of attraction.

She seized on him, drew him with her by his manhood to study the illuminated photographs, giggling and laughing. David went with her as if he had no other thought in mind but to please this oriental oatbin.

Estela was not so understanding. David knew I had something in mind, even if he was not sure what it was,

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and so he played along, but Estela was another pot of tea. She seemed scared. Don Miguel had turned her, he was pressing himself against her front while Andres Galdos was nudging her soft rear end.

I was afraid she might spoil the martmachlian mood.

So I said gaily, "The condemned are going to eat a last meal! Why not enjoy it? Let's let ourselves really go. If Mister Molotov were here, I'd bet he'd ask for a cocktail. So I'm going to ask for one."

Estela blinked. Over her face came the light of sudden understanding. Her black eyes glowed as she nodded at me. She did not know how I intended to manage it, but she would play along, her glance assured me.

"Cocktails," bellowed the Cuban. "*Si! Si!*"

"I am not a drinking man," grinned Kang Chow, bending to kiss my belly-button, "but on such an occasion, I will have a little wine."

Florita came downstairs with the liquid refreshments on a tray. We all helped ourselves. Madame Tsai was drunk on David Anderjanian, but when he lifted a martini from the tray and handed it to her, she sipped it.

"Is too bad you are capitalist spy," I heard her whisper to him. She had never let go of him all this time. I saw the skin above her knuckles whiten as she tightened her grip.

She finished her martini, staring down at him.

Don Miguel said, "We ought to make them put on an act for us while we watch. Make them degrade themselves even more by acting like trained dogs!"

Kang Chow nodded excitedly, as did the Cuban. Only Madame Tsai objected; she was too happy with her slave. But the others overrode her protests. Don Miguel drew her away from David with a gentle hand.

There were benches built into the mahogany wall, covered with cushions, on either side of the room. Florita, at a word from the don, removed a number of these cushions and placed them on the carpeted floor. They were to be

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our stage. The spectators sat themselves down on the near side, making themselves as comfortable as possible.

Florita touched a wall switch. The lights above the pictures dimmed as a small spot formed a pool of whiteness across the cushions. I caught Estela by the hand and drew her into that blazing brightness.

She was turned away from me, so I pressed myself into her buttocks and let my hands slide across her panting belly up to her hard breasts. I buried my lips in her soft neckflesh, burrowing my lips deep so her spill of ebony hair hid my face.

I whispered, "I'm going to try to get upstairs, later. I want everybody in here damn near mesmerized by what they're seeing, understand?"

She moaned, head flung back as if my hands on her hard brown breasts were tuning her in. Under her breath she murmured, "Uh-huh! *Que le vaya bien!*"

My hands were under her breasts, shaking them. She was rubbing her thighs together, mouth open. I don't know whether she was feeling as excited as she was making out to be; she might be a fine actress; but she was getting to the onlookers.

"The man," cried Kang Chow, "let the man get into the act!"

We had to please the audience, so David stepped into the spotlight ready for action. His big hand on my spine pushed me forward. Like a domino falling to the push, Estela went to her knees on the cushions.

I moved forward, crawling over her.

We presented David with his choice of females, unconsciously falling into a part of the ritual known as the union of the goat with his herd of nannies as related in the erotic lore of the Orient. This is another variation of the *begouri* manner of the Arabs, where the man plays at bull, the woman at cow.

David added his own little individuality to this dual display by indulging in those rotary motions known as the

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stitch-work of the tailor, seconds after he had buried himself deep inside me. My mouth opened, I cried out in pussy-cat pleasure as I felt the circular pressures.

His hands were under my armpits, gripping my dangling breasts. Beneath me, Estela was having a hard time maintaining her balance. She was on her hands and knees, she could feel the double weights of David and me above her. The fact that she could also hear the sounds of our double delight was also exciting her, making her wriggle slightly, which disturbed her balance.

Kang Chow was shouting, "*Kung shi! Kung shi!*"

This was a Chinese cry of approval, in which Madame Tsai was soon joining. I risked a sidewise glance, seeing the woman with her cheongsam up to her hips as she rocked back and forth on the edge of the bench.

In a moment, she would have joined us, I am certain. But I did not want that, not yet. My plan involved them all. Everyone except me, that is. I had other things to do this night.

So when David pulled away from me and fell upon the whimpering Estela, I slid sideways out of the pool of light and into the dark shadows. My body went across the darkness until I was crouched before Don Miguel. I caught hold of him, drew him toward the convulsing bodies in the spotlight.

I whispered how eager Estela would be to perform the rite of *mukhamethuma* upon him, while David was pleasuring her. Don Miguel grunted but did not obstruct my hands as they stripped him and pushed him into the center of the spotlight. In a moment he was linked with Estela.

Madame Su Tsai was sobbing in her need for some rants-scantums relief. I crawled to her, I bent and kissed her soft thigh. My voice was a temptation in the dark shadows.

"Will you let the capitalistic bitch outdo you?"

"No," she whimpered. "I can outdo her any time! She does not move, she just kneels there like a dead thing."

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This wasn't quite true, but then, the Red Chinese are not especially noted for their veracity. My hand was sliding up a soft, inner thigh. I let my fingertips play at spiders' legs where she was frothing at the bit. Her hips jerked.

"Show her," I breathed.

My left hand went out to Andres Galdos. He gasped and jerked. "Let her teach you the art of preparing the thread to put it in the eye of the needle," I breathed. "It's an old Chinese custom, this bit of love-play called eating the bamboo stick."

The Cuban was all for it. He began pushing down his trousers while I slid sideways on my knees in front of Kang Chow.

"Why not 'carry fire over the mountains' for pretty Su Tsai?" I cajoled. "Then you and she can play the 'wind and moon game' together!"

Kank Chow gasped, "What do you know of such Chinese delicacies?"

"Enough, great tortoise-head!" I panted.

He was a great tortoise-head, too. My fingertips told me so, sliding over him. Kang Chow was very excited. He stared at Su Tsai as if seeing her for the first time. He licked his lips as his eyes ran up her golden thighs.

"I will play at carrying fire with her!" he sobbed.

He flung himself between her thighs as David Anderjanian had done. His arms slid around her hips. His face buried itself as she wailed in delight. Without disturbing Kang Chow from his devotions, I pulled Madame Tsai off the bench and signalled for the Cuban to join them.

Su Tsai was flat on her back with Kang Chow stretched full length before her. Her glazed eyes saw a suddenly naked Andres Galdos lowering himself toward her face. She reached up with both hands and opened her mouth.

Me, I turned tail and ran.

In the darkness, caught up in their delirium, they did not notice me. Don Miguel and Andres Galdos had their eyes closed. Madame Tsai was in no position to notice

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anything going on around her except what she and her two lovers were doing. And Kang Chow was too busy carrying fire over that shaved mountain to heed me.

I was naked. My barefeet made no sound.

Florita might have tried to stop me, but after delivering the cocktails, she had made herself scarce. Maybe she figured she would be asked to play in the orgy belowstairs, and wanted no part of it.

I raced into the darkened dining room.

The aguardiente bottle was where Florita had left it when she'd taken it out of the knapsack. My fingers tightened around it. I whirled to throw it through the window when common sense told me there was no need to smash glass and arouse the lovers belowstairs.

I opened the window and let the bottle go.

A normal Molotov cocktail explodes with a loud boom when it hits. We had fashioned ours for a visual, not an auditory effect. The bottle flew through the air and hit. Instantly a brilliant red flame burst skyward.

I ducked back inside the room and closed the window.

So the sextet down below shouldn't grow too suspicious of me, I figured I'd better get down there, fast. I did.

Just as I came through the doorway, a number of other people were coming, too. I saw Don Miguel jerking and gasping, I noticed Andres Galdos kneeling with his head thrown back and his mouth open as he wailed out his enjoyment.

Naturally, Estela and Su Tsai were incapable of saying anything, but their naked bodies did all their talking for them, jumping and twisting, heaving up and down and sideways as David Anderjanian and Kang Chow fed pleasure to their flesh. I did not know whether there were any police outside the hacienda. They might be lying dead in some remote corner of the ranch, for all I could tell. At the moment, I was operating on hope alone.

I had to keep up the act, however.

I ran to Kang Chow, I turned him over, I yanked down

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his trousers. Then I caught hold of Madame Tsai and pulled her to her feet, pointing at his yearning *yang*.

"His cloud is almost bursting, noble lady! Can you let him rain in any other country but your own?"

"I shall enjoy the ecstasy of *yin chu yang* with him!" she screamed. She stepped over him, lowered herself in the Venus reversa posture, her back to his face.

She gripped his thighs, rose and fell on him.

Andres Galdos looked desolated. I wriggled a finger at him. I whispered, "Florita wants you—upstairs in the kitchen!"

I caught him by the wrist, tugged at him to follow me. Instead, he wrapped his arms about my bod and pressed my nakedness to his. This was not part of the procedure. I was hoping to get the Cuban off alone with me so I could practice my judo expertize on him.

He was having none of it. He wanted Eve Drum here and now, with us standing up in the *el keurchi* attitude mentioned in The Perfumed Garden. This belly to belly posture of the Shayk Nefzawi is great at times, but this was definitely not one of them. I had too many things on my mind to want anything in my bod.

So I clapped my hands together on his ears, hard.

His eyes rolled up and he sank downward like a half-empty sack of potatoes. I thought he was beyond help—if done right, this old commando attack tactic can kill—but to make sure, I drove the edge of my hand into his larynx with enough force to shatter it.

I stepped over his motionless body. There were three of the enemy left to handle. If I could take care of them by myself, maybe we wouldn't need the police.

Then I saw David and Estela sitting on the cushions, staring at something in the shadows. Their faces told me the jig was up even before I saw Don Miguel standing with a revolver in his hand, aimed at me.

"Don't move," he snarled.

To one side, Kang Chow and Madame Tsai were still

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going at it, her golden hips bouncing wildly, his lean body arching under her. They were in a Nirvana of their own, where there was no such thing as Red China, only this unending *yen*.

"We will wait," the don murmured.

We waited for the two Chinese to finish. They were in no hurry; they did not know what was happening so close to their naked bodies. Su Tsai went on flailing her hips; beneath her, Kang Chow was crying out harsh Chinese syllables that told better than words the enjoyment convulsing his flesh.

Don Miguel was watching them, licking his lips. His body was aroused once more by what he was seeing. David Anderjanian was looking at the don's gun hand, and his muscles were gathering for a leap.

I let my own body crouch to readiness. If David was going to make a try for that gun, I'd help him by attacking just as he did.

David leaped. So did I.

And Don Miguel swung his eyes from the two Chinese to us. He laughed and dodged, his gun came up. His trigger finger tightened.

It was all up. He was going to kill me.

The gun was aimed at my navel. The bullet could not miss its target. I froze there, my eyes closed, waiting for death to come to me.

Don Miguel fired. I felt nothing. Could I be dead? My eyelids rolled back and I saw Don Miguel staggering into the wall. There was a round red hole in his chest. Blood came out of it, at which he stared dumbly. The revolver hung in his lax hand at the end of his limp, lifeless arm for a long moment. Then it clattered to the rug.

The two Chinese were staring at somebody behind me.

I whirled, tensed to leap.

A man dressed in loose blouse and buckskin leggings, with Indian moccasins on his feet, was standing on the

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lowest step of the cellarway stairs. He held a smoking gun in a hand.

"Pablo!" screamed Estela.

I guess I looked properly stupid, because this Pablo grinned at me and nodded. "*Si*, senorita. I am of the *polizia*. The police."

"But—but—"

"We saw your flare. We came as we promised."

I gulped. "The Indians outside—didn't they try to stop you? They—they captured us. They said nobody could get past them."

"They are the braggarts. They forget that the *polizia* also are Indians, some of us—with just as good Aztec blood as those boasters. We police Indians have also been trained in white man's ways. We crept up to some of their lookouts and—pssst! We fired a gas in their faces. They collapsed. No guns were fired, no alarm was given to the principals in the hacienda."

David was lifting a stunned Madame Tsai off an almost blubbering Kang Chow. "Get along to jail, honey," he grinned, clouting her golden rear end with a big hand.

Estela touched the Chinaman with a bare foot. She had picked up the revolver Don Miguel had dropped. It probably looked as big as a cannon to Kang Chow because he nodded and reached for his clothes. He was a beaten man.

Pablo brought us upstairs to meet a number of his fellow officers. They were all wearing cotton shirts and buckskin leggings, with moccasins.

"They do not know us from themselves when they see us in the darkness," Pablo chuckled. "They take us for Indians, too. Which we are, of course—but we are good Indians. Then we squirt the gas and catch them when they fall. It was very easy, really."

"Eve had the toughest part," Estela smiled, "because she was the one who worked out a way to give that signal without alarming the terrorists."

"We all had tough parts—and we played them well," I

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exclaimed, getting in on the mutual admiration act. I put my arms about David and Estela who beamed at me.

The police were all for rounding up their prisoners and getting out of here. I said, "You go on ahead. We three will stay and check the place for documents to prove what a rat's nest we've uncovered."

When the police and their prisoners were on their way, I muttered to my two companions, "Look, you two've had all the fun, downstairs. I think we ought to end our little act with a nice rounding out gesture—like a pleasesome threesome. If you get what I mean."

So we headed downstairs for the games-people-play room.

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